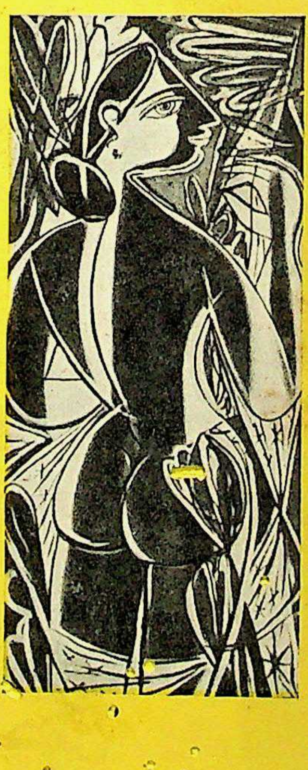
G. Archer

INDIA and MODERN ART



India and Modern Art

राजकीय संग्रहालय पुस्तकालय, लखनऊ
विभाग A
पुस्तक क्रम संख्या 246
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BY W. G. ARCHER

Poems

The Plains of the Sun

Indian Tribal Poetry

The Blue Grove

The Dove and the Leopard

Sculpture and Painting

The Vertical Man

Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills

Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta

Kangra Painting

Garhwal Painting

Indian Painting

The Loves of Krishna

Central Indian Painting

With Mildred Archer

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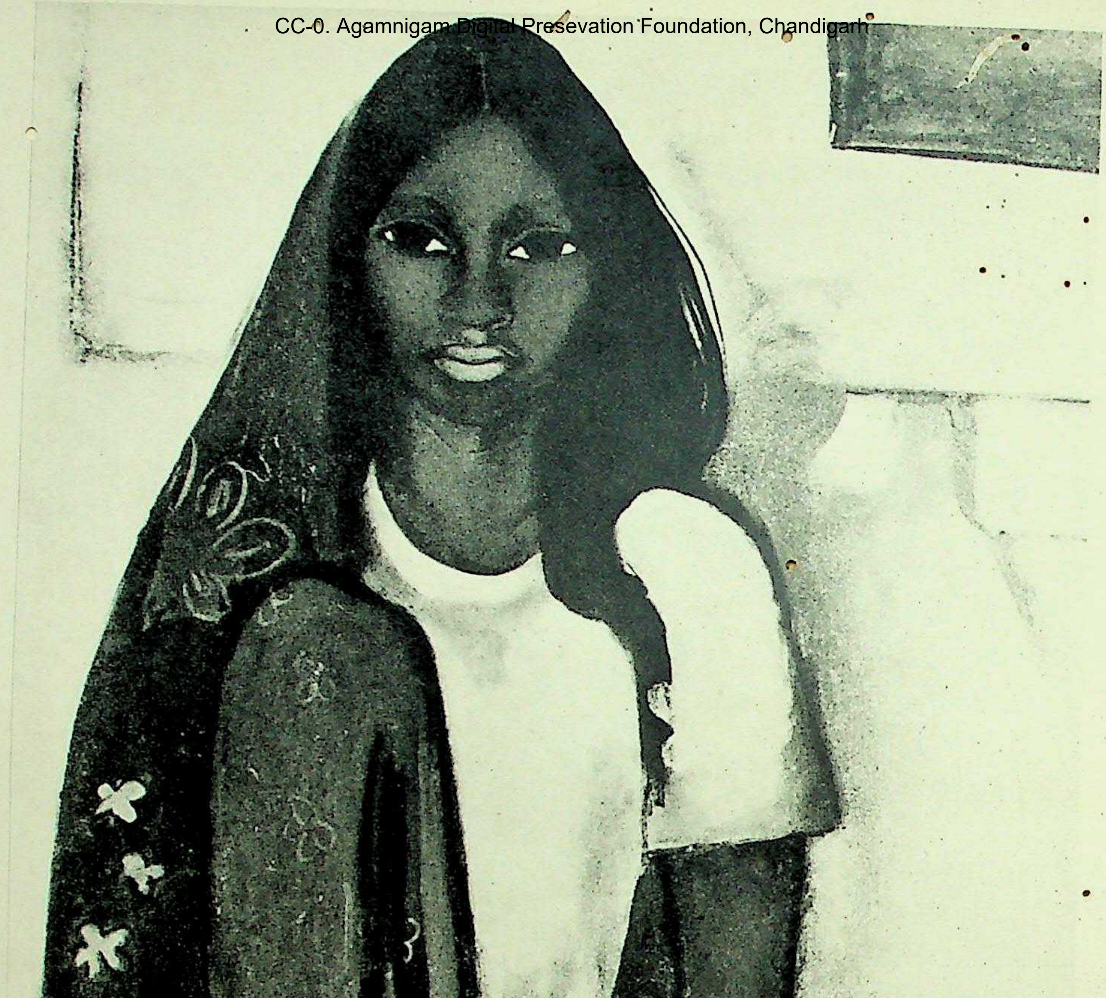

I. AMRITA SHER-GIL. Child Wife, 1936

India and Modern Art

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W. G. ARCHER

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Museum Library, Lucknow

Ruskin House
GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD
MUSEUM STREET LONDON

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1959

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Printed in Great Britain
in 14 pt. Bembo type
by Jarrold and Sons Ltd
Norwich

To Mulk Raj Anand

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PREFACE

In this book, I have attempted to describe the state of painting in India from the end of the nineteenth century to the achievement of Indian independence in 1947—to trace, in other words, a history of the first modern movements in Indian art. Such a history must deal with painting only. If we exclude the primitive sculpture of the countryside—some of which I discussed in my book, *The Vertical Man*—Indian sculpture was no longer a living art during these years. It is true that sculptors of promise have emerged since independence. Their work, however, falls outside our period. For the art of India, between the years 1896 and 1947, we must look to painting, since only here can we find expressions of a modern spirit.

Such a history requires the discussion of Indian art, Western art and India itself. In describing the course of recent Indian painting, therefore, I have included material which I hope throws light on all these subjects. On the side of Western art, I have discussed the paintings of Samuel Palmer, Blake, Gauguin, Klee, Munch, Picasso and Wifredo Lam; while on the side of traditional Indian art, I have stressed the kinds of sculpture and painting which excite modern interest, the underlying nature of the Indian tradition and the expression in poetry of Indian ideals. With India, my task has been more difficult. It would have been tempting to describe my meetings with Rabindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy and George Keyt, the discussions I have had with friends and associates and the emotional impact which India made on me during the years I lived there from 1931 to 1948. Such experiences certainly heightened, if they did not actually determine, my responses to modern Indian art, but this is hardly the place to detail them in the raw. While, therefore, I realize that many of my interpretations must owe their origins to private talks, impressions and meetings, I have preferred to adopt a more objective approach and, wherever possible, employ descriptions by other writers to evoke the India of this period.

Besides the writers listed at the end of this book, I am deeply indebted to individuals and authorities who have kindly supplied me with material for illustrations; to Robert Melville whose collaboration in *Forty Thousand Years* *of Modern Art* elucidated for me much of the poetry and symbolism of modern painting; to Mildred Archer and Basil Taylor, both of whom made important and constructive criticisms; to Karl Khandalavala and Charles Fabri for information concerning Amrita Sher-Gil; and to Harold Peiris, Peggy Peiris and Martin Russell for facts concerning George Keyt. I must also express my deep gratitude to Helena Hayward, Roland Penrose, Mulk Raj Anand, Bishnu Dey and John Irwin, whose continued enthusiasm for modern art and lively stimulus have encouraged me to attempt the present survey.

Part of the material for this book was delivered as lectures at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard; the Phillips Gallery of Art, Washington; and the Asia Society, New York, and I should like to thank my audiences for their vivid interest and warm responses.

W. G. ARCHER

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I

Art and the British

THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

THE period with which we are concerned opens with an event which, at first sight, may strike us as a little strange—the arrival of a certain Englishman in 1896 as Principal of the Calcutta School of Art. The British do not, as a rule, identify themselves with other peoples, but throughout the British connexion with India, a few were as much Indian as many Indians themselves. A. O. Hume founded the Indian National Congress, C. F. Andrews was a close associate of Gandhi, and Verrier Elwin awakened India to the problem of her primitive tribes. E. B. Havell was certainly of this type. He had arrived in 1884 to assume charge of the Government School of Art, Madras. He did not, at once, declare war on current usage and, during the next twelve years, steeped himself in Indian culture. But a sense of indignation slowly mounted. In 1896 his chance came. He was appointed to the premier school of art in the capital of India and, with the steps which he then took, a new movement in Indian painting begins.

This movement was not, by itself, of great importance. It did not introduce modern art to India, nor were its actual products of artistic moment. It served rather as a necessary step to a second movement—a movement which begins in the middle of the nineteen-twenties and includes the painting of Rabindranath Tagore, Amrita Sher-Gil, Jamini Roy and George Keyt. These painters were not directly influenced by Havell, yet it was he who made their work possible. His books raised Indian morale and his writings—*Indian Sculpture and Painting*, *Indian Architecture*, *The Ideals of Indian Art*—drew world attention to a great artistic tradition. As we shall presently see, his writings are now out-moded and some of his ideas were incorrect. But his central plea remains and it was due to his intervention that conditions favourable for modern art were created.

To understand Havell's conduct, we must begin with the situation at the end of the nineteenth century. In 1896, painting in India was still existent, but only by a distortion of terms could it be described as *Indian*. During the nineteenth century, the feudal conditions which had fostered Mughal and Rajput art had rapidly decayed and, although painting had persisted in the Punjab Hills and in Rajasthan, it had become by 1870 a mere archaic relic. As the British conquered India, their superior techniques impressed the old nobility, the ancient order declined and the Indian artist, as he had formerly existed, was superseded. Only, in fact, for purposes which bore but scant relation to Indian culture did artists still possess a function, and this they owed to circumstances which were barely connected with art at all.

Such an outcome must be ascribed to Macaulay. In his Minute of 1834, he had viciously attacked Indian culture, scoffing at 'medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding-school and geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter'. He had gone on to describe Indian culture as 'absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics and absurd theology' and had advocated the training of a class of persons 'Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect'. This goal had been approved first by the East India Company and then by the Home Government itself, and in 1853 Sir Charles Trevelyan had even defended it as a necessary instrument of imperial policy.

> 'The only means at our disposal [he wrote] for preventing revolution is to set the natives on a process of European improvement. They will then cease to desire and aim at independence on the old Indian footing. The national activity will be fully and harmlessly employed in acquiring and diffusing European knowledge and naturalizing European constitutions.'

And he had added with plausible ingenuity:

> 'In following this course we should be trying no new experiment. The Romans at once civilized the nations of Europe and attached them to their

rule by Romanizing them; or, in other words, by educating them in the Roman literature and arts and teaching them to emulate their conquerors instead of opposing them. The Indians will, I hope, soon stand in the same position towards us in which we once stood towards the Romans.'

By 1870 Trevelyan's hopes had been amply fulfilled. In Bengal and Bombay, as also, to a great extent, in other cities of Upper India, a new middle class had come into existence, educated in British ideas, moulded by Western conceptions, and scornful of early forms of Indian expression. By 1896 the writings of Rabindranath Tagore had stirred Bengalis to a partial recognition of their own language and literature, but British values were still so connected with social and political prestige that, as late as 1917, C. R. Das could declare:

'We had made aliens of our own people, we had forgotten the ideals of our heart. . . . Mimic anglicism has become an obsession with us. We substitute meeting-houses for temples; we hold lotteries in aid of orphanages; we give up the national and healthful games of our country and introduce all sorts of foreign importations. We have become hybrid in dress, in thought, in sentiment and culture, and are making frantic attempts even to be hybrids in blood.'

In this general process, art could hardly escape contagion, but whereas in literature, science and philosophy the British had never doubted the superiority of Western knowledge, to art their attitude was more equivocal. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the cult of the picturesque had been a superior amusement, particularly among the British residents in up-country stations. Landscapes had been sketched, flowers and beasts recorded and, in the general exploration of picturesque India, local artists had been taught the water-colour technique and encouraged to produce sets of 'Native Characters', 'Trades', 'Festivals', 'Deities' and 'Conveyances', as well as to copy birds, animals and flowers. The resulting style was a mixture of the Indian miniature technique and the drawing methods taught in young ladies' academies in eighteenth-century England. For a hundred years the phenomenon lasted, but during its course only the rarest of British individuals had a word of praise for Indian art itself. At Lucknow, Richard Johnson, John Baillie and later Sir Gore Ouseley made large collections of Mughal, Deccani and Lucknow paintings, while other Company servants, such as Warren Hastings, Robert Clive and William Kirk-Patrick, also returned to England bringing important examples. In contrast, most other Englishmen merely regarded with amused pity the occasional Indian pictures which crossed their paths.

'Whatever may once have been the state of the arts and sciences amongst the natives of India [wrote Stocqueler in 1844], they are now confessedly at a very low ebb. Their architecture is tame, monotonous, mixed, and irregular; their carts, carriages, boats, and agricultural machinery are all rude, cumbrous, and rickety; their drawing and painting set at defiance form, perspective, light, shade, and harmony.'

Only, in fact, in their ability to copy did the 'natives of India' seem to possess some latent power and this was sufficiently occupied in producing the studies of bungalow servants, hook-swinging festivals or bazaar inhabitants to which we have just referred.

By 1860 even this grudging employment of Indian talent had begun to wane. The industrial forces which were killing the artist in Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills were now to liquidate the 'Company' painter. The 'sketching mania' which had served so many Englishmen as a substitute for art, became outmoded and to the sterner men who now took charge of India's affairs even British art was regarded as a somewhat futile activity. 'Their vigour [wrote W. D. Arnold in 1853], their strong sense, their prompt and business-like dexterity have earned for them as a class, a justly honourable distinction. These are what may be called the commercial virtues. But except good men of business, what are they?'

It is not surprising, therefore, that about the middle of the century many British regarded art as a useless irrelevance. As late as 1885, Sir Monier Williams noted that 'not a single fine large painting nor beautiful statue is to be seen throughout India. Even the images of gods are only remarkable for their utter hideousness,' while the official handbook of the Victoria and Albert Museum declared, 'the monstrous shapes of the puranic deities are unsuitable for the highest forms of artistic representation and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown as fine arts in India'. If painting was 'unknown' in India, it was hardly necessary to create it, and thus, but for two significant developments, it would almost certainly have languished, scorned and moribund.

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Art and the British

Although the vast majority of British residents in India were beyond the reach of art—the phenomenon is not unknown even today—a few exceptional individuals shared the moral attitude to aesthetic questions, which, starting with Ruskin, had come to pervade the Victorian upper classes. The most significant of them was Lord Napier, who as Governor of Madras delivered a lecture in 1871 to the Native Christian Literary Society of Madras. His subject was 'The Fine Arts in India', and the lecture disclosed not only a new pride in India's former traditions, but a deep concern for its cultural renaissance. Yet even more significant were his basic assumptions. He began by deploring that painting did not exist and then discussed the themes and subjects which Indian artists might explore. 'Indian mythology, Indian landscape and Indian people [he declared] provided unrivalled opportunities for artistic description,' the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, in particular, containing

> 'the most inexhaustible and diversified stores for pictorial representation which any country possesses. All that is needed to promulgate their beauty and complete their fame is that in their purer and nobler passages and with the powers of European Art, they should engage the service of the national pencil as they have fastened on the national memory and animated the national voice.'

Such themes, however, were not all.

> 'To many [Lord Napier went on], the most intimate and pleasing range of art motives is to be found in the portraiture of human emotions of ordinary life. The stairs of the village tank, the busy movement of the rustics with their cattle in the rice-field, the fishermen mending their nets on the melancholy shore, the crowd and clamour of the religious procession, the mourners retiring from the place of incremation—in such scenes the native painter would work an abundant vein.'

Finally, he stressed the possibilities of portraiture.

> 'In all countries, the painter has a resource in the pride and tenderness of the human heart. Most men desire to possess the likeness of those they love. There is no reason to suppose that these influences will be less powerful in India than elsewhere. In regard to costume, the Indians have only to preserve the stuffs, colours, dresses, jewels and arms of their forefathers and they will sit with much greater advantage to the painter than Europeans of the present day. But portrait-painting among the upper classes of India may perhaps

admit of more diversified combinations than with us. It may readily be connected with festivals and durbars, with trains of attendants and with accessories of animal life. Portrait-painting might thus be practised in a very noble manner in India. The taste for it would not be wanting in native courts, while the opulent landed proprietors and the merchants of the great cities would feel the same impulses and offer the same encouragement.'

The spectacle of a Governor actively concerned with Indian art was bound to impress Indian noblemen, and in the neighbouring State of Travancore, the Maharaja hastened to extend his patronage. 'Raja' Ravi Varma, profiting by the visit to Travancore of a European portrait-painter, Theodore Jenson, began to paint in oils (Fig. 2). A little later Lord Napier instituted an annual Madras Exhibition and between 1874 and 1878 Ravi Varma twice won the Governor's medal with studies of Indian life and religion. On the first occasion he portrayed a *Nayar Lady at Her Toilet*, and on the second, *Sakuntala's Love-letter to Dashyant*. In 1879 he was commissioned to paint the Governor's portrait and in 1886 two portraits by him were exhibited at Delhi. One was of the Maharaja of Bhavnagar, the other of the late Maharaja of Kashmir, described in the catalogue as 'a genial but astute looking old gentleman of European aspect, garbed in highly Eastern costume and glittering with jewellery and precious stones'. Following the exhibition Ravi Varma developed even further his flair for recording Indian mythology, and so great was the interest aroused in Bombay and Baroda that Raja Sir T. Madhava Rau sent the artist a letter, saying:

'There are so many of my friends who are desirous of possessing your works that it would be hardly possible for you with only one pair of hands to meet such a large demand. Send therefore a few of your select works to Europe and have them oleographed. You will thereby not only extend your reputation but will be doing a real service to your country.'

A little later, oleographs began to pour from a press in Bombay and were continuing to do so when Ravi Varma died in 1905. During the closing years of the nineteenth century, in fact, the westernization of Indian art had achieved at least one triumph. Just as other Indians were now expressing their thoughts in flowing English, an artist had depicted the age-old themes 'with all the powers of European art'.

The second development in Indian art sprang from entirely different circumstances. Throughout the nineteenth century many British had as strongly admired the crafts of India as they had deplored its painting and sculpture. It was with growing concern, therefore, that they watched the effects of Western competition on Indian manufactures. Until the eighteen-fifties, trade had quietly accompanied the expansion of British rule and, as a consequence, British manufactures had ousted a number of village industries. This process had occasioned little comment so long as there were commodities in India of value to the home market. As the century advanced, however, the impact of the Industrial Revolution on Indian art-manufactures began to dislocate Indian life, and in order to pay for an increasing volume of imports, it became necessary for the Government itself to take action. The proper step would obviously have been to impose protective tariffs, thereby giving Indian villagers a breathing-space in which to meet the new situation. Such a remedy, however, would have horrified not only British officials in India but members of the Government at home. A different solution had therefore to be devised, which, while leaving the Indian home-market to the mercies of Western competition, might slowly increase the competitive power of Indian goods. The solution adopted was ludicrous. It was nothing less than the establishment of a college of art.

> 'I would make the institution at Marlborough House [wrote Sir Charles Trevelyan in 1853] a model for a college of art. Art is taught there systematically. I would establish an institution at Calcutta on that model. There is a peculiar call upon us to give the natives of India all the advantage in the cultivation of the arts which it is in our power to give, for in order to favour our own manufactures imported into India and partly by levying a heavy duty upon Indian manufactures imported into England, in addition to the natural manufacturing superiority of England, we have by these means swept away great branches of manufacture and have caused great distress in India. Consequently I consider that we owe a heavy debt to India in this respect and that it is specially our duty to give our Indian fellow-subjects every possible aid in cultivating those branches of art that still remain to them.'

Trevelyan's programme is not entirely clear, but its general purpose was two-fold. On the one hand, it would 'maintain, restore and improve the application of oriental art to industry and manufacture'. On the other hand, it would modify existing designs in the light of British taste so as to make them more suitable for export. And with these purposes in view, a number of art schools were established.

The first school, which slightly ante-dated Trevelyan's statement, was opened in 1850 in Madras—its object being to 'improve the taste of the native people as regards beauty of form and finish in the articles in daily use among them'. A special industrial department taught metal-work, silver-work, jewellery, carpet-making, pottery and modelling, while drawing in all its branches was also included.

Four years later a school of industrial art was founded in Calcutta. Its programme was more ambitious, and besides holding classes in industrial techniques, it included a course for training general draughtsmen, elementary drawing masters, industrial art workmen, and designers in perspective and architectural drawing, painting and lithography, and another for painters of various classes and for sculptors. In 1857, Bombay followed with industrial workshops and classes in drawing, painting and sculpture, while in 1875 the Mayo School of Arts was opened in Lahore to encourage and promote good design, decoration and construction in all the decorative and applied arts amongst the artisans and craft-workers. Classes in drawing, wood-carving, architecture and engineering were begun, and in addition a copper-smithy was started.

Yet, despite official support, the results of all these institutions were discouraging, and when in 1878 examples of handicrafts were exhibited in Paris, it was even suggested that the art schools themselves had contributed to the collapse of Indian crafts. Writing in May 1879 to Sir George Birdwood, who had organized the Indian court at Paris, a group of English artists deplored the pace at which Indian village industries were racing to destruction.

> 'We do not doubt that all men of culture will agree with us in thinking that the welfare of the arts in question is important both to India and to Europe and that the loss of them would be a serious blow to civilization and an injury to the pleasure and dignity of life: and if this importance be at once admitted, we cannot conceive that any thoughtful person will deny the responsibility of England in the matter or the duty which a great country owes to the arts of exercising foresight and patience lest, for an apparent commercial gain, she

and the world in general should lose industries which have for ages made India famous.'

It is Birdwood's reply, however, which is significant, for, while thanking the writers for their support, he said:

> 'We must avoid too exclusive and too indiscriminate blame of Schools of Art. The influence of Europe on the East is inevitable and the presence in India of cultivated English gentlemen at the head of Schools of Art cannot fail in the end to correct the degrading effect of the necessary strain of European commerce on the village and sumptuary arts of India. After all, the chief offenders against Art in India are the official departments engaged in the manufacture of jail carpets and the construction of public buildings; and it is particularly through the neglect of native architecture and the propagation of a bastard English style, blindly followed by the people themselves, that the government threatens the slow destruction of the historical handicrafts of India.'

Schools of art, then, were exonerated, but so far as their main objective was concerned, the revival of local industries, only one conclusion was possible—they were not a success.

If their influence on Indian crafts was negligible, the schools presented an even more dismal spectacle in the field of painting. When first started they had included the teaching of drawing as an essential part of an artist-designer's equipment. But between the designer engaged in improving forms and the craftsman who carried them out, there had immediately stretched a gulf. The artist-designer was a new creation, a person with no traditional place in the previous system and, however influential it was hoped he might later become, he remained, in practice, a pathetic outsider. Those who qualified in drawing, therefore, were forced back on their own resources and instead of revitalizing industry they were compelled to seek a livelihood in other directions.

The consequences of this development were what we might expect. In Bombay it had never been intended that

> 'European instruction should suppress the ideas of indigenous art in the minds of the Native students. On the contrary, the many sound principles, which pervade the ancient art of India, were to be affectionately and reverently preserved. But it was thought that European instruction could show the Native youth many things not found in their own art, respecting both form

and colour, could teach them at least how to draw from nature correctly and artistically, and could at all events make sure that the beauties of the works, produced in olden times, should be duly observed by the present generation. Competent instructors were employed; and the classrooms became filled. The students were made to sketch not only objects modelled in the European style, but also the finest portions of the antique ruins.'

As a result, if we are to accept Sir Richard Temple's estimates, 'many young men received artistic instruction and some aesthetic culture' and, perhaps more readily than in other centres, were absorbed into professions such as those of portrait painters, photographers, lithographers, engravers, wood and ivory carvers, ornamental designers, draughtsmen and architects.

Elsewhere, however, the situation was much more critical. In Madras, art instruction had focused on Western models and, with a view to showing the correct approach to human form, copies of old masters had been brought out from England—among them various studies of the nude. Their influence, however, was brief, for, far from displaying a coldly academic interest, the students regarded them as 'naked English ladies' kindly provided for their delectation by an understanding government. It is doubtful if the school authorities ever quite recovered from the shock which attended this discovery, and by 1876 Robert Chisholm considered that the institution 'was doing much more harm than good' and urged its immediate closure. 'After elaborate enquiries, he could not find on the educational side a single student continuing an artistic career after leaving the institution, and on the industrial side there was nothing being made that could not have been better made outside.'

At Lahore the position was equally serious, for when, in 1883, the founding of a *Journal of Indian Art and Industry* was mooted, 'the employment of the students of Schools of Art in preparing illustrations for the journal' was solemnly put forward as an incidental but important 'advantage attendant on such a publication'. And a year later Sher Muhammad, Ram Singh, Kapur Singh, Amir Bux and Muhammad Bux—all of them students of the school—were actually employed in drawing ewers and brass vessels for reproduction in the journal, there being apparently no other scope for their talents.

But it was in Calcutta itself that the situation reached its nadir. Here also instruction had closely followed British models, and, as a result, various artists had passed from the school after being trained in Western techniques. No immediate employment awaited them and in despair an association known as the Calcutta Art Studio had then been formed, 'the passed students uniting their skill and labour for the common benefit'. Flamboyant lithographs depicting Hindu deities had been produced, and for a while the ex-students had contrived to earn a living. Even this venture, however, collapsed, for the drawings were soon copied in England, and when chromo-lithographs arrived in Calcutta, the Studio succumbed. The school of art continued but its reason for existence was slight.

This was the situation in Calcutta when E. B. Havell arrived in 1896.

II

Art and Revivalism

E. B. HAVELL AND ABANINDRANATH TAGORE

THE policy which Havell put into practice was based on three considerations, the first involving the nature and function of schools of art. We have seen that by 1896 these had failed to revive art-manufactures. If they had any justification, it would have to be sought in other and hitherto subordinate roles—that of training artists for professional careers. And on this aspect Havell embarked.

During the previous ten years, in fact ever since the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885, a few exceptional Englishmen had come to realize that the whole policy of anglicizing India was wrong. However efficient British rule might be, the very fact that it was British must alienate Indians. Writing to Calcutta graduates in 1883, A. O. Hume had said:

> 'All vital progress must spring from within and it is to you, her most cultured and enlightened minds, her most favoured sons, that your country must look for the initiative. In vain may aliens, like myself, love India and her children; in vain, may they, for her and their good, give time and trouble, money and thought; in vain may they struggle and sacrifice; they may assist with advice and suggestions; they may place their experience, abilities and knowledge at the disposal of the workers, but they lack the essential of nationality and the real work must be done by the people of the country themselves.'

Havell agreed. In all schools of art, the bias had so far lain in a Western direction, and the results had been deplorable. British art, he considered, gave

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'no spiritual impulse and afforded only the poorest mental pabulum, with its mechanical perspective, not related like oriental perspective to the laws of design but only empirically, to the science of optics; with its anatomy, likewise unrelated to artistic thought; and its "principles" which even the British failed to put into practice'.

It was hardly surprising, therefore, that not only had many students failed to obtain employment, but those who had were making only the most abject contributions either to British or to Indian art. The most successful artist was Ravi Varma, the same artist who had aroused Napier's enthusiasm. Yet it was precisely Ravi Varma's pictures which paralleled British art in its most banal form.

'The art [Havell later wrote] which truly reflects . . . the teaching of Anglo-Indian art-schools is exhibited in the paintings of the late Ravi Varma, who is the fashionable artist of modern India for those Indians who do not ignore Indian art altogether. Though not trained in a school of art, all his methods have been based on the academic nostrums of Anglo-Indian schools, fine-art societies and art critics. It is difficult to understand whether the popularity his works have gained is to be attributed more to the common realistic trickery which he has borrowed from European painters or to his choice of Indian subjects. But certain it is that his pictures invariably manifest a most painful lack of the poetic faculty in illustrating the most imaginative Indian poetry and allegory; and this cardinal sin is not atoned for by any kind of technical distinction in the execution.'

Havell, however, was less concerned with British deficiencies than with the lack of Indian qualities. Madras, where he had first taught, had never possessed a strong artistic tradition in painting, but it had been particularly well placed for the studying of Indian religion and philosophy. Annie Besant had made her headquarters at the neighbouring town of Adyar, and although Havell himself did not become a theosophist, the reverent attitude of her disciples to Indian religion may well have influenced him in his approach to Indian art. What, at least, is clear is that during his early years in the country, Indian sculpture and painting aroused his fervent enthusiasm. He revolted against the current British aversion and from this he was led to believe that a school of art could alone fulfil its purpose if it strove to resurrect the national genius. Painting in India, in other words, must become Indian in attitude, execution and spirit. And it was this view which determined his actions.

His first step, on joining the Calcutta School of Art, was to abolish the British system of teaching. 'In the ordinary European art academy [he wrote] the student goes through a long, laborious and rather painful process of eye-training to develop his imitative powers.' All true Oriental art practice, on the other hand, was based on composition from memory rather than the eye. 'The oriental artist develops his imitative skill mainly by the exercise of his creative powers.' It was necessary to return, therefore, to these ancient principles, and as a beginning he abolished the 'antique' class and the practice of copying from European casts. This action involved a further step—the reorganization of the Calcutta Art Gallery to which the School of Art was then attached. 'This institution had been established by a benevolent government for the purpose of revealing to Indians the superiority of European art' and, as a result, almost all the annual grant of £250 was being spent on the purchase of European pictures. The sum had not gone far, 'so the dreary waste of bare walls was partly covered with "drawings from the antique" by students of the school of art'. So gross a warping of Indian taste appeared quite indefensible and Havell accordingly began to discard the sombre series of plaster casts and to sell by auction the European pictures.

Such a break with British methods was only a first step. What was more important—but much more difficult—was to create a system to take its place, and to this problem there appeared to be only one answer. Indian artists, in Havell's view, must return to the Indian tradition as it had existed before the British. They must use traditional themes, express traditional sentiments, employ traditional styles. They must, in other words, understand Indian art and, more especially, its 'spiritual and ethical purpose'.

> 'While European art retains the sense and form of its earthly environment [he declared], Indian art is always striving to realise something of the Universal, the Eternal and the Infinite. Soaring into the highest empyrean, it is ever trying to bring down to earth something of the things above. Indian art is essentially idealistic, mystic, symbolic and transcendental. The artist is both priest and poet. In this respect Indian art is closely allied to the Gothic art of Europe—indeed Gothic art is only the Eastern consciousness expressing itself in a Western environment. But while the Christian art of the Middle

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Ages is almost emotional, rendering literally the pain of the mortification of the flesh, Indian art appeals only to the imagination and strives to realise the spirituality and abstraction of a supra-terrestrial sphere.'

And in a passage contrasting Buddhist sculpture with the art of Greece, he wrote:

'The Hindu artist believes that the highest type of beauty must be sought after not in the imitation or selection of human or natural forms but in the endeavour to suggest something finer and more subtle than ordinary physical beauty. The Indian artist would create a higher and more subtle type than a Grecian athlete or a Roman senator and suggest that spiritual beauty which, according to his philosophy, can only be reached by the surrender of worldly attachments and the suppression of worldly desires.'

It was in fact only those sculptures which depicted the Buddha (Fig. 3) which seemed to Havell essentially Indian, and he went so far as to describe these works as 'original and imaginative creations which are worthy to rank with the noblest creations of the West'.

Hinduism, on the other hand, appeared decadent and corrupt, and he declared, 'When the spiritual fervour which created Ajanta, Ellora and Borobodur had spent itself', India was forced to await the arrival of Islam for its 'next great wave of religious feeling'. This new religion, Havell stresses, 'had a most disastrous effect upon Indian sculpture', but it

'did not suppress the instinct for artistic creation which has always accompanied great national, religious and intellectual impulses. The artistic genius of the Moguls, deprived of the sculptor's chisel, realised itself in a noble idealistic architecture—of which the Taj Mahal may be regarded as the consummation—and under the enlightened patronage of Akbar, a secular school of Indian painting arose, which, though it lacked the high spiritual purpose which inspired the old religious schools, nevertheless deserves the appreciation and careful study of all artists for its perfect sincerity and high technical distinction.'

Moreover,

'the Mogul school, though naturalistically inclined, has this in common with the idealistic art of the Buddhist and Brahmanical epochs—that it always kept in view the highest aim of the artist—to penetrate the soul of things and to bring us into closer relation with Nature's eternal verities'.

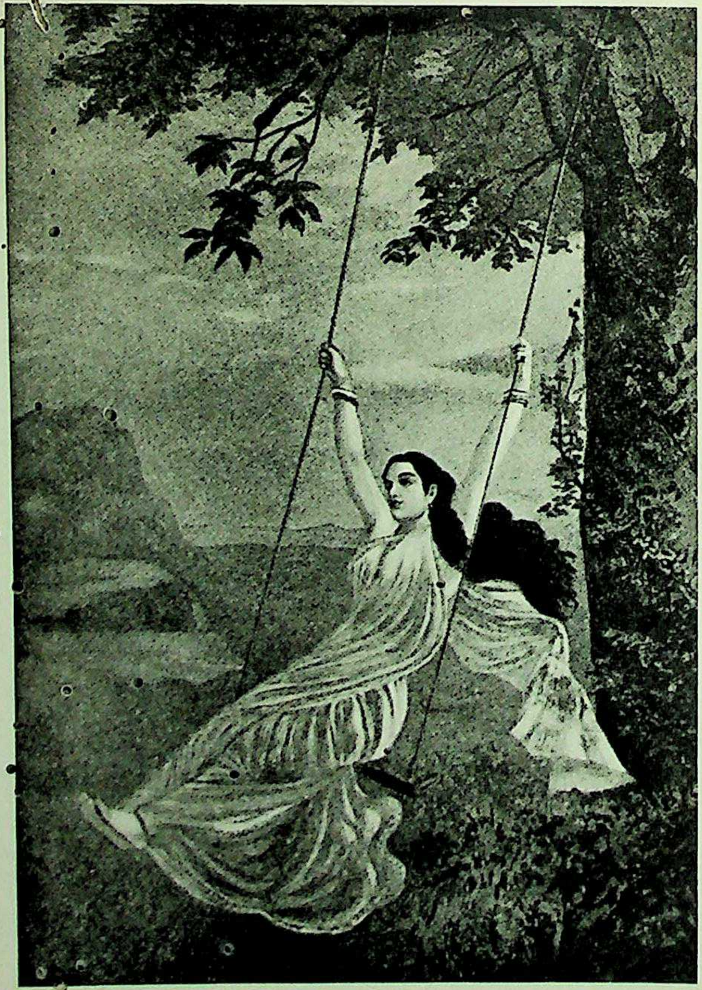
It was marked by 'sincerity, truthfulness and perfect finish', by 'faithful refined workmanship' and by 'atmosphere and beauty of sentiment'. Even when Aurangzeb tried to suppress art, Mughal painting survived, for 'it quickly grafted itself on to the older Buddhist and Hindu schools and thus became truly Indian—a national tradition and part of national culture—though for the purpose of historical classification, we may still call it "Mogul"'. This national 'Mogul' art persisted into the British period, and Havell asserts that 'even under the depressing influences of the nineteenth century, Indian art could still create things of beauty recalling the strength and spiritual fervour of its former days'. He illustrates this type of painting with examples of nineteenth-century work from Jaipur and Amritsar and describes a specimen of the Sikh school as follows:

'Like the pure melody of an old folk song, it is a true creation of national sentiment, of the poetic impulse which flows spontaneously from the heart of a people inspired by the joy of life and love of beauty. . . . The figures in this picture are by no means attractive types or very deeply studied as to character; but their glowing draperies and the gay colours of the musical instruments together with the pearly tones of the marble and the bright hues of the flowers serve the purpose of the artist—to express the beauty and gladness of the radiant Indian sunlight.'

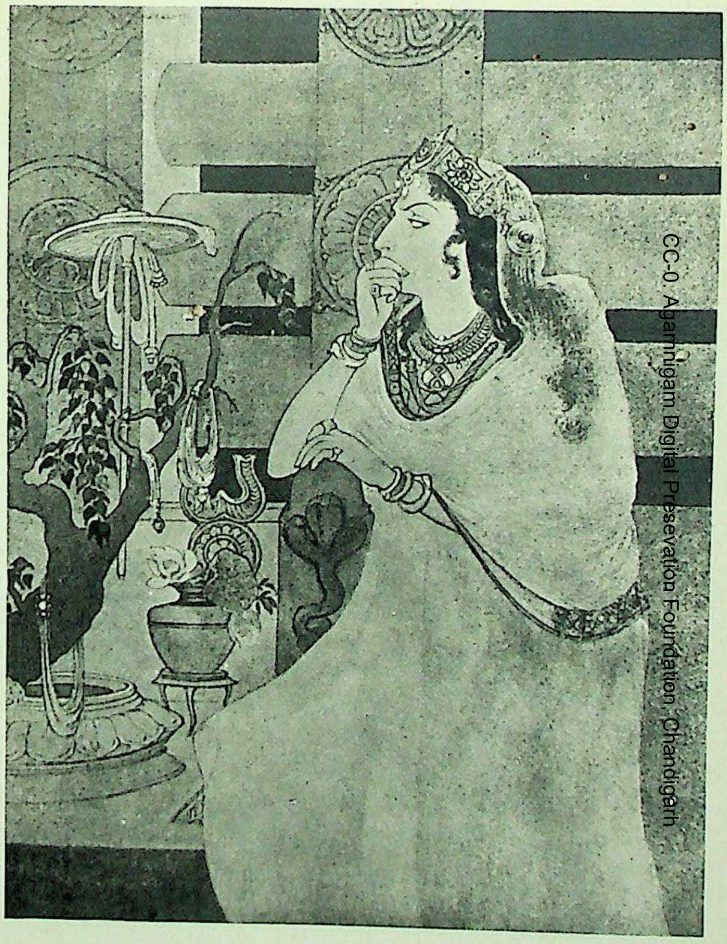
A picture of this kind, Havell considered, was truly Indian, and 'this would form the surest and best foundation on which to build up the revival of Indian painting'.

Such views were revolutionary in the extreme. Not only were they in sharp conflict with current British practice. They involved a fresh attitude to Indian art. It is hardly surprising, then, that on their introduction Havell's students expressed shocked dismay. And, in fact, writing much later, Havell himself conceded his early difficulties.

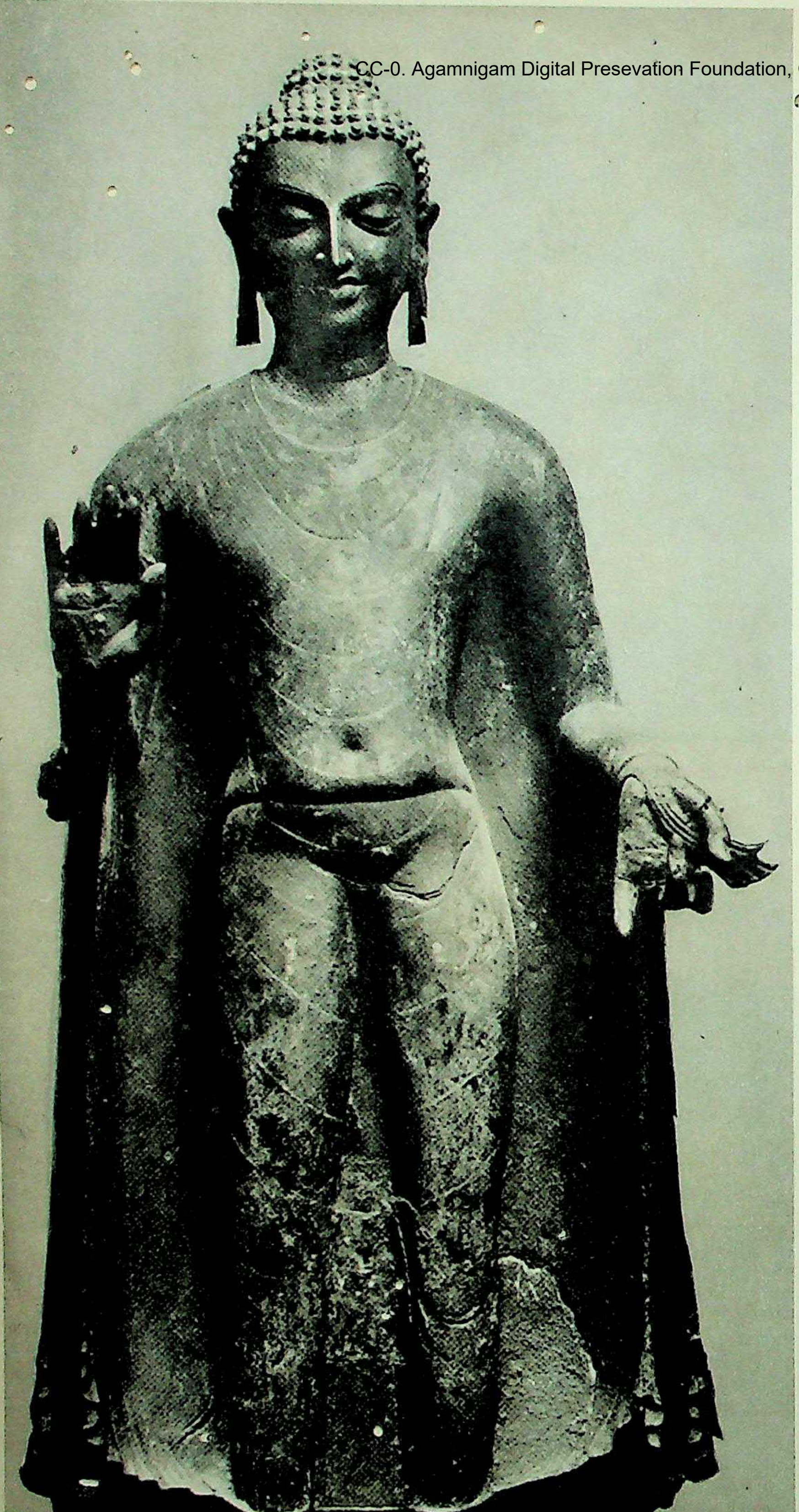
'The students of art schools naturally expect a European principal to teach European art and one of the greatest difficulties I had to contend with for



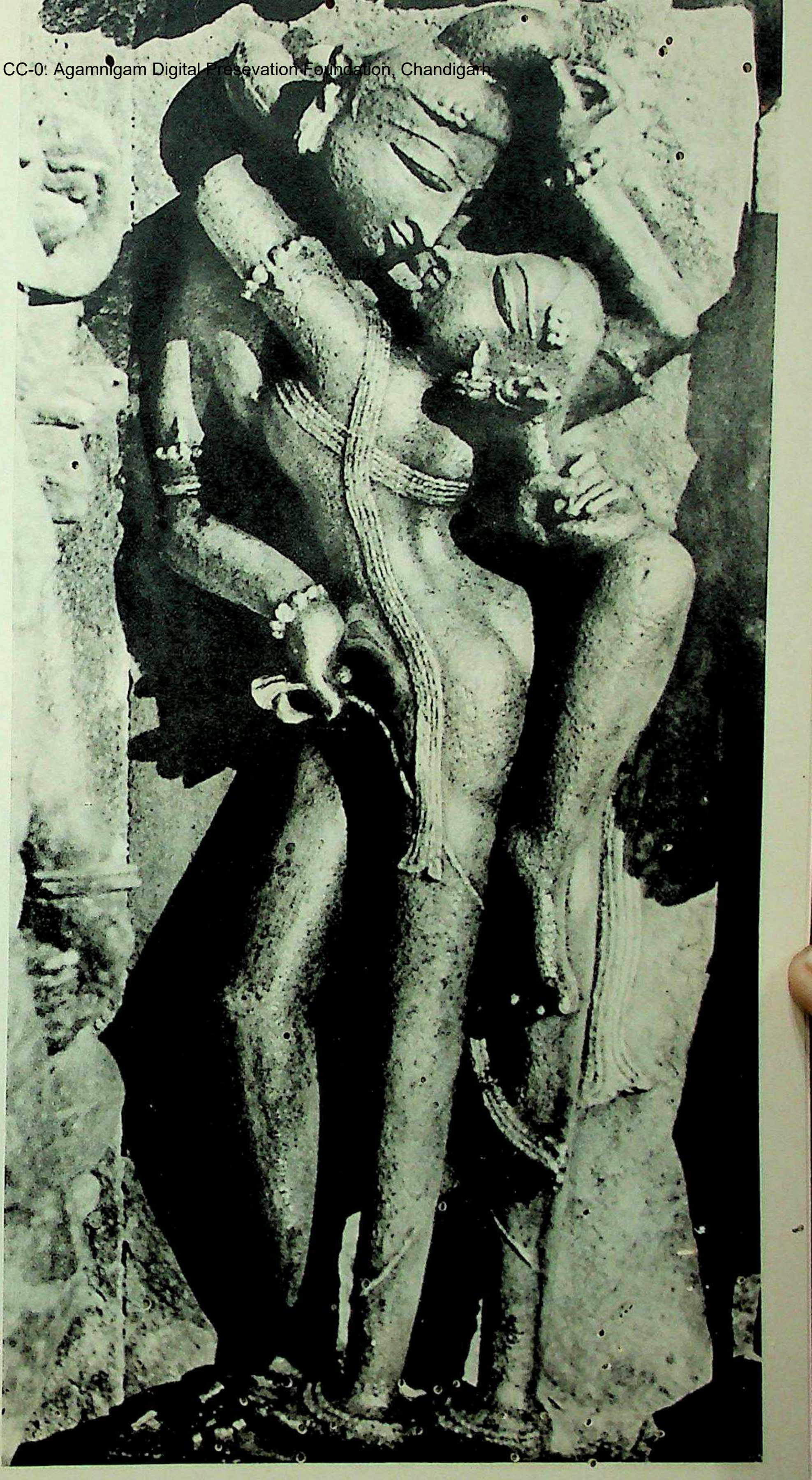
2. RAVI VARMA. Mohini, *c.* 1885



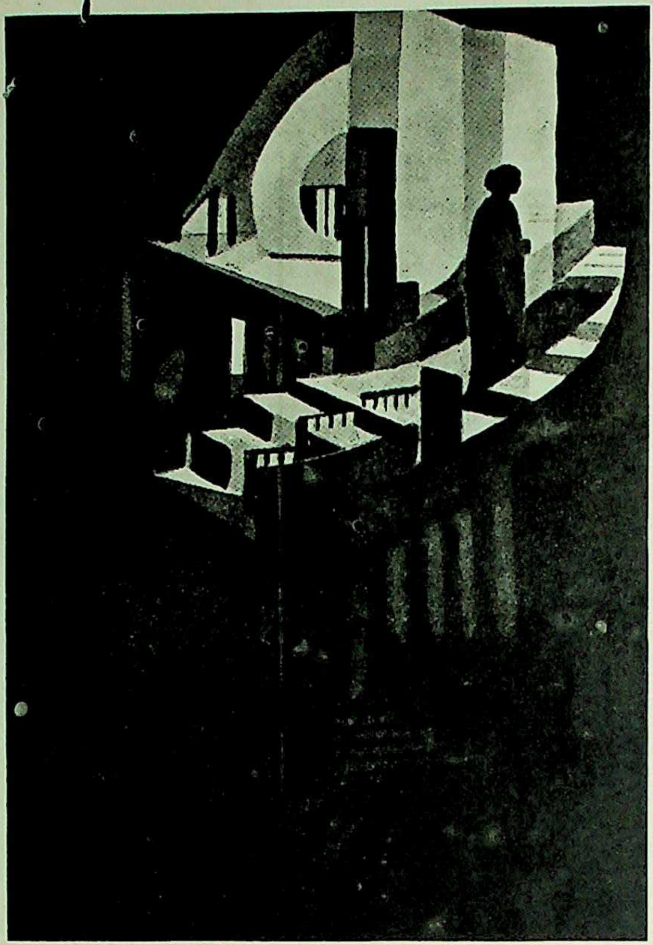
3. ABANINDRANATH TAGORE. Asoka's Queen and the Bodhi Tree, *c.* 1905. Chromo-lithograph
Victoria and Albert Museum, London



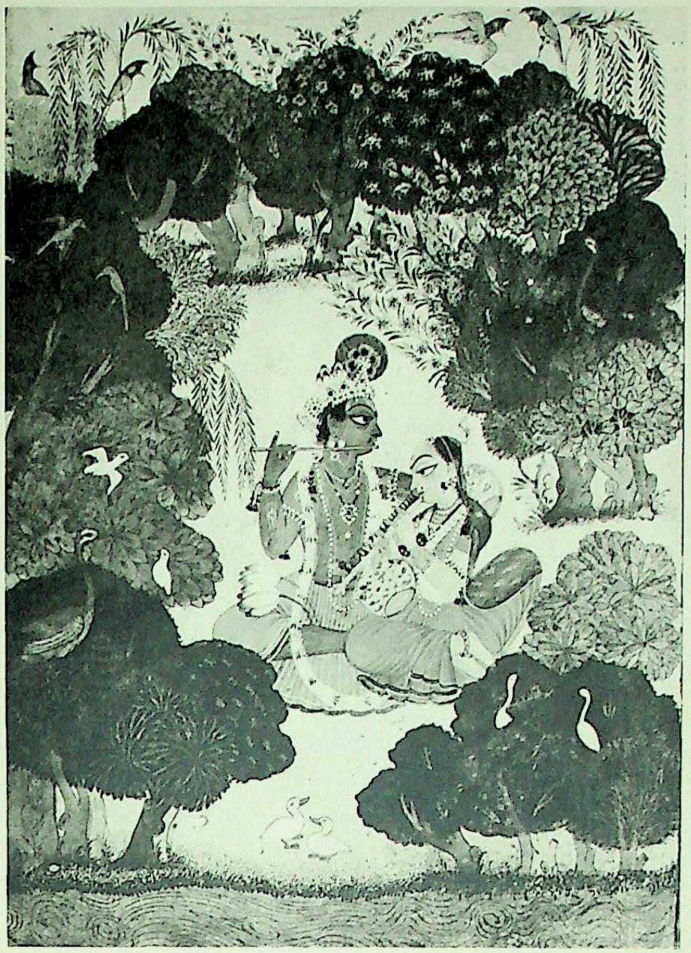
4. Bronze Figure of the Buddha
Sultanganj, Bihar, *c.* seventh century A
Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery



5. Lovers
Kali Temple, Khajuraho
Madhya Pradesh, India
eleventh century A.D.
(*Photo: Raymond Burnier*)



6. GOGONENDRANATH TAGORE
Light and Shadow, *c.* 1920



7. Radha and Krishna in the Grove
Basohli, *c.* 1740
Central Museum, Lahore, Pakistan

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many years was the opposition of students and their parents to what seemed to them the retrograde and inconsistent policy of making Indian art the foundation of the entire curriculum of the school. They were willing to accept the proposition that Indian art should be taught in the lower classes or on what is called the industrial side of the school, but the ambition of every student was to become eventually a portrait painter or sculptor and obtain prizes at the Simla Fine Arts Exhibition—the Royal Academy of Anglo-India.'

And for such a goal, the new policy was clearly quite inadequate.

Despite the general opposition, however, one student responded. Abanindranath Tagore had been born in 1871, a member of the landed aristocracy, and being free of economic cares, was able to take a dispassionate view of art. In his early youth he had learnt to sketch from his father, Gunendranath Tagore, who had himself been one of the first students of the Calcutta School of Art. A little later Abanindranath had joined the school, and first under an Italian, O. Gilhardi, and later under Charles Palmer, had acquired the rudiments of Western technique. After six years spent in sketching the Bengal countryside and in illustrating his uncle, Rabindranath's poems, he had reacted from Western methods, becoming aware of a certain restless yearning. When, therefore, Havell declared his dislike of art-school teaching, Abanindranath felt an emotional affinity. The very day of his taking-over, Havell showed him some Mughal miniatures and Abanindranath 'realised for the first time what treasure lay hidden in the mediaeval art of India'. From this sense of mutual understanding, there developed a close friendship, and until Havell's retirement in 1905 the two had one resolve—to re-create a national style. 'Havell', Abanindranath has said, 'took me up and shaped me and he had my reverence all through as the guru. Sometimes he would playfully call me his "collaborator" and sometimes his "disciple". Indeed he loved me as his younger brother.'

To appreciate the problem intellectually, to realize that a new approach was essential—this was an important beginning. But styles in art do not spring from acts of reasoning. They cannot be willed or argued into existence. They can only emerge from keenly felt needs and precise artistic knowledge. And it is here that we approach the crux of the problem. When Abanindranath began to practise Havell's advice, his achievement was influenced by his private limitations—his character, personality and antecedents. And these, quite as much as intellectual ideals, decided his first experiments and account for their equivocal outcome.

His first handicap was technical. As a young artist, he had suffered from the absence of a vitalizing tradition. His equipment was limited to the training he had earlier received at the Government School of Art—a training which had left him a weak draughtsman and given him no feeling for strong design or powerful colour. For an artist to imitate the Mughal style without belonging to the Mughal period was to invite failure, and thus we find in the long series of 'Mughal' works which he now produced, a persistent weakness due to these very deficiencies. We can recognize such 'Mughal' qualities as minute attention to detail, an interest in characterization, a concern for drama. The line, however, is hesitant, the colour drab, the composition inconclusive (Fig. 3). Only, in fact, in certain superficial ways are these pictures 'Mughal'. In others, their basic qualities are those of the Calcutta School of Art in which Abanindranath had all along been educated, a school which was still, in all essentials, simply and feebly British.

The second limiting factor sprang from his general upbringing as a Bengali. We have seen that a national movement was slowly growing up. In Calcutta, however, this movement was by Bengalis for Bengalis. Led by the Tagore family itself, it had vindicated the Bengali language as a medium of expression and revived traditional Bengali culture. But it was provincial rather than national—perhaps, we should rather say, it was national but in a provincial manner. It defined India as Bengal and worked for Indian freedom so that Bengal herself might be free. Mughal art, however, was a product of northern India rather than of Bengal. In painting a picture such as *The Dream of the Taj*, Abanindranath was therefore adopting a subject which possessed no geographical connexion with his racial origins. The intimate union of subject and artists which had underlain the greatest achievements of Mughal painting was lacking and the result was an art devoid both of strong convictions and real enthusiasm. It is rather as empty anecdotes that Abanindranath treated these moments of history—anecdotes of which the main appeal could, at best, be sentimental. Such an upshot is hardly to be wondered at, for, from the very beginning, Abanindranath had felt a vague disquiet. Indeed in the same note in which he recorded Havell's revelation of Mughal painting, he said, 'I saw too what was lacking in the motif—the emotional element. And this I determined to supply. *That* I realised to be my mission.' Mughal painting plus emotion—the prescription has a certain plausibility, but the result, in Abanindranath's case, was sentimentality and of the crassest order.

A third qualifying factor sprang from the very nature of Havell's diagnosis. We have seen how he had stressed the importance of the 'transcendental' and the 'supra-terrestrial', and had insisted that the new movement in art must be nothing if not spiritual and religious. Abanindranath, on the other hand, had grown up in a more agnostic household in which faith in the gods of Hindu mythology had been superseded by a vaguer, more abstract philosophy. He could hardly depict the gods of Hinduism as vivid personal realities. He could at most accept them as intellectual concepts and strive to imbue them with ethereal mystery. For such a programme, however, Mughal art was quite unsuited. Indeed only by very special pleading had Havell been able to connect it with 'deep and spiritual impulses'. If, then, Mughal art was to be the starting-point—and this was axiomatic—the contradiction could only be resolved by deliberately enhancing its spiritual character. 'To express a thing definitely as well as to leave much of it indefinite, to define the indefinite—this is the problem which we artists are expected to solve.' Such a problem, however, was almost incapable of solution—it has perhaps been solved only by such artists as Turner or Whistler and by certain artists of China and Japan. And it is significant that when in 1902 some Japanese artists, Hisida and Yokahama Taekwan, visited Calcutta, Abanindranath accepted their work, with its sober colouring and wispy suggestiveness, as yet another reason for rejecting a purely Mughal manner.

To understand the kind of painting which emerged, however, we must take into account one final circumstance—the actual state of India when these pictures were produced.

'In the second half of the nineteenth century [Sir Percival Griffiths has said] India was furnished in all important departments of State with highly organised and trained services, fully geared to the growing complexities of administration. There can be little doubt that they represented a new level of efficiency and even their sternest critics would admit that they established standards of integrity hitherto unknown in India. With these virtues, however, went a certain aloofness and an unconcealed consciousness of superiority which educated Indians found galling.'

This attitude was to persist into much of the twentieth century. Queen Victoria had said in 1858, 'Their prosperity will be our strength, and their contentment our security, and in their gratitude our best reward.' But in 1905 the Prince of Wales wrote that while

> 'the Natives are better treated by us than in the past, I could not help being struck by the way in which all salutations by the natives were disregarded by the persons to whom they were given. Evidently we are too much inclined to look upon them as a conquered and down-trodden race and the Native, who is becoming more and more educated, realizes this. I could not help noticing that the general bearing of the European towards the Native was, to say the least, unsympathetic.'

And of Lord Curzon, Gokhale, the president of the Congress, said in 1905:

> 'I think even the most devoted admirer of Lord Curzon cannot claim that he has strengthened the foundations of British rule in India. To him India was a country where the Englishman was to monopolize for all time all power and talk all the while of duty. The Indian's only business was to be governed, and it was a sacrilege on his part to have any other aspiration. In his scheme of things there was no room for the educated classes of the country. Even in his farewell speech, India exists only as a scene of the Englishman's labours.'

And it is this iron resolve on the part of the British to maintain their superior position which provides the clue to the situation. Attitudes on the part of the governed were changing. The attitudes of those who governed remained the same. Amongst Indians, and in particular Bengalis, there was a new will to freedom, a vast desire to rid the country of the British. But there was not, as yet, a sense of freedom. In fact, the British seemed stronger and more aloof than ever. Much liberty existed, but of freedom in the sense of equality on railway trains, politeness in casual encounters, warmth and friendship, there was still no general sign.

In such circumstances, to return to the past, as Havell had suggested, fulfilled two very different needs. On the one hand, it revived the only existing sources of national art, but, on the other, it consciously escaped from a painful present. If freedom was remote and unattainable, it was only by rejecting the present that illusions of freedom could be gained. Yet in retreating to the past, in cultivating 'the great historical themes', it was impossible to jettison all feelings of the moment. A sense of drab despair, of helpless dejection, of timid distaste remained, and it was moods such as these which coloured painting. 'Why have none of you painted a picture with sunshine?' Juel Madsen asked Abanindranath in 1924. And the artist replied, 'It is because we Indians do not see the sun. Suppose you look out on a clear blue sky and then you are told about somebody who is killed. At once you find the sky grey and the landscape dark. We Indians do not paint things as they are, we paint from the feelings which possess us and we paint ourselves. We are never glad—there is no smile in India—the children do not play in the streets; they do not even smile. We carry the darkness in our soul.'

And such a mood—despite its theatrical language—is the final explanation of Abanindranath's style. As it developed over a period of thirty years, it became identified with certain qualities—hesitant, indecisive line, misty vagueness of form, sombre murkiness of colour, likings for wistful girlish stances, dainty wanness, anaemic sentimentality. Some of these qualities spring directly from technical weaknesses—his inadequate training in the British technique, an imperfect mastery of Mughal idiom, the force of Japanese example. They are also due, in part, to the mystical nature of Havell's teaching—a point to which we must presently return. In essence, however, they derive from the contemporary situation. They are the qualities which go with a tepid shrinkage from reality, faltering distrust, a failure in courage. Only an aggressive personality—an Indian Havell—could have produced a more vital and robust solution. Abanindranath was sensitive, tentative, gentle—a complement to Havell rather than a parallel—a reformist rather than a revolutionary—and in his painting his character stands revealed.

III

Art and Nationality

CRITICS AND THEORIES

THE criticisms we have just made are obvious enough today. In 1900 they were much less clear. Indeed so inspiring was the very fact of change that for thirty years the new style of painting was keenly practised. In 1905 Abanindranath was appointed Principal of the School of Art, Calcutta, and the choice itself was proof of Havell's success. Younger artists began to adopt Abanindranath's manner, with its tepid colour and wistful sentimentality, and some of these painters in due course became the principals of provincial schools of art. Asit Kumar Haldar went to Lucknow, Samarendranath Gupta to Lahore, Devi Prasad Roy Choudhury to Madras, the brothers Sardar and Barada Ukil to Delhi, while Nandalal Bose eventually took charge of the Art School and Museum at Santiniketan. Although differing in details, the style of all these artists reflected Abanindranath's example. They had supplemented Mughal models by imitating the paintings of Ajanta and, as a result, slender girls in Ajanta-esque poses had begun to dominate painting. Ajanta browns had echoed the sombre hues already in favour and the effect was of a languid dream expressed in a manner half-miniature, half-monumental.

This style came before the public through exhibitions, magazines and journals. In 1905 the Indian Society of Oriental Art was formed, and an exhibition of 'modern' works was soon a regular feature of Calcutta life. Some years later, in 1919, the Society founded a journal, *Rupam*, in which, side by side with investigating the Indian art tradition, pictures from what was now to be known as the neo-Bengal school were also published. In addition, *The Modern Review*, founded in 1907 by Ramanand Chatterjee, acted as a general purveyor of cultural information—its articles including subjects as diverse as 'Bee-keeping', Mrs Sarojini Naidu's poems, 'Hygiene of Student Life', Ezra Pound's translations, 'Gandhi's Jail Experiences', 'Toilet Secrets of Bird and Beast', studies in Indian history, 'The Arithmetic of Elections', 'How Bad Girls are made into Respectable Women', 'Should Harmoniums be Abolished?', 'Arabic Poetry'. Some of these contributions may nowadays strike us as a little comical. But their very catholicity gave the journal value. Besides much that was trivial, new ideas were discussed, a constant recurring feature was a coloured frontispiece reproducing an Indian painting, and through this means works by all the artists of the neo-Bengal school came to be widely known. So successful, in fact, was his enterprise that after a time the editor issued a series of coloured reproductions called *Chatterjee's Picture Albums*. These brochures gave a coherent idea of the new school, and as a result, not only in Calcutta but in other parts of India, pictures by Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, D. P. Roy Choudhury, Gupta, Haldar and the brothers Ukil came to be regarded as modern art.

For such an achievement both Havell and Abanindranath Tagore deserved credit. Yet to Indian critics, watching the progress of the movement, the situation was grim indeed. To those who were aware of previous Indian art or art outside India, these paintings were of small account. The critic could not ignore them, neither could he despise the motives which had prompted their production. He was obliged to express sympathy if only to make more acceptable his final judgement. And we can understand his dilemma from an article on 'The Modern School of Indian Painting' written in 1911 by Ananda Coomaraswamy. The new pictures were clearly no more palatable to him than some of Abanindranath's pictures had proved to the English critic, Roger Fry. Yet he could not wholly damn them, and so we find him writing in the following terms.

'Those who are familiar with the nature of the influence of European upon Indian art during the nineteenth century and the squalid, uninspiring and wholly foreign character of Indian education, making Indians strangers in their own country, can only wonder at the possibility of even so much reaction as has taken place during the last ten years. Nor can those fairly judge the work of the Calcutta school who do not make themselves personally acquainted

> with its ateliers and all the young enthusiasm which is there spent in serious effort to find some effective means of escape from a state of aesthetic stagnation far worse than the Early Victorian with which the Pre-Raphaelites had to deal.'

This said, however, he is obliged to express dismay, and he points out that although the significance of these neo-Bengal artists lies to some extent in their Indianness, 'they are by no means free from European and Japanese influences'. In some of Abanindranath's later work especially, 'the colouring is so low in tone as often to make the very subject of the picture hard to decipher'. And he adds, 'This is as far as possible a departure from the pure clean colour schemes of earlier Indian art and is no true way to express mystery or wonder.' Again, although most of the Calcutta paintings were, in a certain sense, graceful, Coomaraswamy considered them 'too often sentimental in conception, weak in drawing and gloomy in colouring'. While, therefore, 'what has been accomplished, considering the very adverse conditions obtaining in India a few years ago, and to almost the same extent today, is much', his final conclusion is decisive. 'It is not what the world has the right to expect from India.'

This view-point was shared by another keen nationalist and art critic, O. C. Gangoly, and gradually there arose the conviction that far from having solved the major problem of how to revive Indian painting, the new movement in art had failed completely. Nothing could be hoped from these tepid eviscerated pictures, and in fact it was necessary to re-argue the issues from the beginning. Such a frank examination might at least prevent future mistakes from being made, and in the process the correct conditions needed for vitalizing Indian painting might become clear.

A first cause of the movement's failure is suggested in a trenchant statement by Gangoly.

> 'It is an intellectual movement [he says], at once deliberate and conscious, rather than spontaneous and intuitive. It is the result of an antiquarian interest and not of a desire to return to the dreamlands of ancient art and life, born of a real ennui of the sordidness and the deepening materialism of modern life. It is undoubtedly inspired by national memories, but hardly yet pulsating with the throb of modern aspirations. The age of transition has not yielded place

to the age of national reconstruction in India, as yet, and however much this new movement might indicate the lines on which this reconstruction should begin, it has not yet developed any strong "national" images which one would fondly like to see envisaged in its present-day art-forms. The movement merely symbolises a discontent of the present-day environments and the ideals which have engendered them—a vague aspiration for something better—an aspiration as yet lacking in strength and vitality.'

And he goes on to insist:

'The forms of the old art of India were born of the necessity of expressing the feelings which the artists were led to experience; and the forms of the old frescoes of Ajanta or the conventions of the Rajput drawings could never compensate for lack of *feeling* directly born of personal experience.'

Artists, in fact, must learn to *feel*, for only through strong feeling could a more robust style emerge.

But feeling was linked with theme, and to Gangoly the choice of mythological and historical subject-matter was equally relevant. 'With the advent of British domination [he wrote] an entirely new set of forces had made their entrance into Indian life,' and whether the new artists liked it or not, modern India 'with its new costumes and gestures, new environments and settings and new occupations' had come to stay. In this modern India, the old gods had lost their appeal, and to go on reproducing their imagined appearances was merely to be archaic. 'In an age of disbelief and materialism it is futile for an artist to expect his audience to take any serious interest in his epic and legendary themes. . . . However honourable a place these classic themes may have in the race-culture of India, they have practically ceased to have any roots in present-day national beliefs.' As a result, 'the affected interest in ancient classic themes has meant no more than reproducing the formulas of old traditions', while to 'cultivate an apathy to contemporary life' was to deny the current reality, to deny India herself. Such an attitude could never result in a truly national art, neither could it lead to one that was modern. And Gangoly ended, 'For if it be conceded that the conditions of life around us are hampered by many depressing circumstances and by unspeakable vulgarities, it behoves the artist by means of his art to make us sensitive to the inanities, degradations and imperfections of our environments.' Archaic themes, in fact, must be discarded. The modern character of Indian society must be accepted, and then, and only then, would adult responses ensue.

Such criticisms were indeed pertinent. But they were only a prelude to a much larger question—the type or style of art through which a modern artist should express his feelings. There is a sense in which pictures presuppose pictures, painting feeds on painting. And here we encounter the decisive development which had occurred in the thirty years succeeding Havell's protest—the discovery by Indians of modern art itself. During the years 1900 to 1925, Indian awareness of world art had undergone a gradual revolution. Educated Indians had visited Europe. Some had studied Western art in France and Italy, and as a result conceptions of art had changed. It was realized that art could no longer be equated with naturalism, but must also include the most expressive kinds of distortion. And we can see how far from Havell Indian aesthetics had moved from a semi-humorous passage written by Gangoly in 1922.

> 'Some of my friends [he wrote] have a nodding acquaintance with Massacio and probably some of them are at the present moment balancing El Greco with Cézanne, Holbein with Anupchatar and Chinese grotesque sculptures with the daring creations of Boccioni and Brancusi. I am here concerned only with the catholicity of modern Indian aesthetics. We find new thrills in Maurice Denis and Pierre Bonnard. "La Danseuse" of Van Dongen gave me shocks which I never received from any bronze figure of Nataraja. Rousseau's "Centenary of Independence" has for me transcended the "rasa" of Botticelli's "Spring". I have a secret sympathy with the latest Parisian craze over Negro sculpture. I can recall the new "rupollasa" which I experienced when they brought to me their Polynesian image when I first set foot on Java-dwipa. I can therefore sympathise with Picasso, Matisse and Derain in their first thrills with the Tami masks from New Guinea and share their new joys with the Kilamantan charms from Borneo. We are not for ever chained to the beauties of Persian carpets. We can slowly respond to the charms of Peruvian textiles.'

Modern art, in fact, had arrived. Its forms were varied, but it was clear that in several respects it differed radically from previous art—in its constant search for intensity, its ruthless simplifications of form, its wild and drastic distortions. Such a style stood in direct relation to modern society, and only by accepting this relationship would a new and vital art be possible.

These conclusions seemed unavoidable, but still there remained one vital question—could such an art be appropriated by India, and if appropriated, then in what way? And although this question was not discussed by the artist, its relevance was made starkly, even brutally, clear by the example of Gogonendranath Tagore.

Between the years 1923 and 1928, Gogonendranath, a brother of Abanindranath, experimented with Cubism, producing a series of pictures filled with blending geometric shapes. His style was, at first sight, not unlike that of early followers of Braque and Picasso. Shapes were analysed into rectangles, triangles and cubes, and as a result his pictures were at first acclaimed as brilliant importations of the modern idiom. Yet, apart from their very evident lack of power—a power which in some mysterious way was present in the work of Braque and Picasso—Gogonendranath's pictures were actually no more than stylized illustrations. His picture, *Light and Shadow* (Fig. 6), is made up of blacks, whites and greys and is a simple illustration of geometric architecture. There is no attempt to break the shapes down into their fundamental structure or to link them into a single cohering rhythm. The artist merely selected a scene that looked Cubistic and set it down with academic care. Such a picture, and others which he painted in an identical manner, were open to two objections. They were weak as art, but what was more important, they were un-Indian. Not only had Gogonendranath's style no vital affinities with other forms of Indian expression but its prevailing tone seemed frigidly indifferent to Indian feelings, interests or sensibility. As a result, his pictures, despite their modernistic manner, had an air of trivial irrelevance. A vital quality was lacking, and it was plain that before modern art could develop in India, another issue would have to be resolved. However modern and cosmopolitan a particular society might be, it had still its own national character—a character which made modern France different from modern Italy, modern India different from modern France. Each country had its own artistic traditions, its own national styles, and these in some obscure way must inevitably colour the particular modern art it evolved.

> 'We cannot escape our mental climates [Sir Herbert Read has said], for they are in a literal sense the creation of our prevailing winds and the chemistry of our soils. It is inconceivable that English art should be *decisively* influenced by Indian art or French art by African art. In saying this I am fully conscious

of such cross-currents as the influence of Negro sculpture on Picasso or the influence of Mexican sculpture on Henry Moore. Such influences are like injections of a drug: they act as a temporary stimulus and restore the body to health. I do not deny their necessity or deprecate their usefulness. But they are shocks which should be absorbed into the main blood-stream: they should not persist as a habit or a fashion.'

And he goes on:

'The history of art shows that the art of any particular region always tends to revert to a regional norm—to a mode of sensibility and style of expression determined, we must assume, by ethnic and geographic factors. There is no need to base a philosophy, much less a religion, on such simple materialistic premises. Art cannot be confined within frontiers—it lives only if continually subjected to foreign invasions, to migrations and transplantations. But if art's vitality comes from the cross-breeding of styles, its strength comes from stability, from roots that grow deep into a native soil.'

Necessary as it might be, then, for Indian artists to adopt a modern manner, knowledge of Indian art was equally essential, and thus the critic found himself adopting the same position as Gangoly when he wrote in 1916:

'The threads of old traditional forms have to be picked up and strung upon, lengthened and developed on new lines according to the exigencies of the new form of thought and life in modern India. And in this preliminary stage a certain attachment to the leading strings of the old art-forms is necessary and even healthy; as it is much preferable to borrow from the art-forms of a nation's own past achievements than to copy models from foreign countries. For art is nothing if not national.'

Such a view-point, we might object, is Havell's. We must recall, however, that in 1896 appreciation of Indian sculpture and painting was in its infancy. Much Indian art was still unknown, and it was inevitable, therefore, that Havell's view-point should be partial. Moreover, the character of his education, his moral earnestness, the Victorian vogue for classical idealism, indeed the whole state of English art at the time had made it natural for him to assess Indian art in ethical terms. During the thirty years that had followed, this stand-point had become outmoded. The Indian discovery of modern art had taken place and it was realized that far from stressing the main character of the Indian tradition, Havell had merely emphasized a particular aspect. He had magnified this into a grand vision of the whole and had neglected and even scorned the works of art which, from a modern point of view, comprised its greatest glory. Artists must return, then, not to Havell's Indian art but to something very different—Indian sculpture and painting as modern art had revealed it. And the ways in which these two conceptions differed were fundamental.

Havell had lavished his strongest praise on sculptures of the Buddha with their stress on spirituality (Fig. 4). But Buddhism was only a transient phase in Indian history. During the first six centuries of its existence it had not produced any spiritualized form of art, and it was only from the second century A.D. that the Buddha figure was interpreted in sculpture. By the seventh century, Buddhism was already in decline, and by the thirteenth century it was totally extinct, save in the continent's southern extremity, Ceylon. Viewed in the light of Indian history as a whole, it was only an aberration, a temporary reaction against a much more fundamental mode of Indian feeling. Its repudiation of the senses, its denial of the body, its shrinkage from sensuality ran counter to much that the Indian mind has always valued, and even at its peak these very qualities had obstinately asserted their existence. In the earliest Buddhist stupa of Barhut (first century B.C.) *yakshis* or nature godlings appear as feminine figures toying with the branches of trees or displaying with calm dignity the vegetative fullness of their forms.[1] There is no shrinkage from the physical fact; there is rather a close identification of nature with the enchantments of sex. At Sanchi (first century A.D.), female forms, 'their pliant bodies bent like bows', reveal an even greater luxuriance,[2] while the large nature figure (second century A.D.) from Didarganj, Bihar, has a bland magnificence, a radiant pride in womanly physique.[3] At Mathura (second century A.D.) the same exulting delight in the majesty of the female body imbues a series of figures, also of nature godlings, from a Jain stupa, the Kankali Tila.[4] With their open-eyed charm, air of boisterous abandon and joyous sophistication, they are the very opposite of ascetic ideals. Even in the Buddhist period, therefore, sensual glory was a vital aspect of Indian sculpture and the reverse of the spirituality so firmly stressed by Havell.

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[1] H. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia* (New York, 1955) II, pl. 33.
[2] *Ibid.*, pl. 15.
[3] *Ibid.*, pl. 5.
[4] *Ibid.*, pl. 75.

But it was in medieval sculpture, and particularly in figures of *apsaras* or heavenly dancers, and of lovers in union (*mithuna*) (Fig. 5), that Indian feelings for sexual love received their most entranced expression.

> 'Today [wrote Rothenstein] we look at the *apsaras* figures at Sanchi, Badami, Ellora or at the loveliest of all, the mediaeval carvings at Kanarak, Bhuvaneshwar and Khajuraho[1] and accept them gratefully with the figures from Botticelli's *Primavera* as enchanting manifestations of man's delight in human beauty. I doubt if anything lovelier has been made by the hand of man than the Indian mediaeval temple.'

Yet to all this art, Havell had been impervious. In such circumstances the principle of a return to former Indian art was not in itself to blame: it was rather the view-point which was wrong. Havell's interpretation had borne but little relation to the full artistic facts, and it was not Indian art which he had striven to revive but Indian spirituality.

Such a reassessment concerned sculpture; but radical changes had also occurred in the appreciation of painting. At the time when Havell made his decisive break with Western teaching, Mughal miniatures and the frescoes of Ajanta had been the only known examples of Indian painting. The style of both was one of supple naturalism, and Havell had therefore concluded that this was a necessary ingredient in a national Indian style. Between 1900 and 1920, however, a second strand of art had come to light. It was represented first by Jain paintings of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, then by Rajasthani and Malwa paintings of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, and finally by a type of painting local to the little hill state of Basohli in the Punjab Hills.[2] This art was the reverse of naturalistic. Figures were given rhythmical contours. Strong, hot colours were employed. Eyes were enlarged and bodies distorted. Single flat planes were constantly used, and the total effect was one of 'savage intensity'. Indian painting in this highly charged style was quite un-Mughal. It was the product of mainly Hindu centres, and it was certainly as typical of Indian sensibility as its alternative—the style of naturalism. Such a strand of art was already modern in its freedom from literal representation, and although the circumstances in which it had been created differed from

[1] H. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia* (New York, 1955) II, pls. 314–315, 318, 340–343, 368–370.

[2] W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting* (London, 1956).

those of modern society, its idioms could easily be adjusted to modern needs. An Indian artist employing this second style could incorporate the idioms of modern art without repudiating previous painting. Regarded in this light, therefore, modern art and certain types of Indian painting were not in conflict; they were parallel examples of the same mode of expression.

It was the gradual realization of this truth which was perhaps the chief outcome of the period 1900 to 1930. It is hardly possible to take one single year—to point to 1902 or 1925 and to say that in this year the correct recipe for modern Indian painting was devised. It is even doubtful whether any single Indian critic ever reached quite so precise a formulation of the ingredients required. It is rather that the general climate of Indian art gradually changed. The causes of Abanindranath's failure were increasingly understood, and the conditions which might, in certain circumstances, produce a strong national art became much clearer. No modern Indian painting, it was seen, could hope to possess contemporary validity unless it was both strongly modern and strongly Indian. But what kinds of art, in actual practice, could possess these vital requirements? For the painter, two courses were open. He might adopt modern art and then rely on his Indian nature to adjust it to Indian aims. Or, starting at the other end, he might employ an Indian style and, confident that he was modern in outlook, remould it to his private purposes. In the one case, he would interpret India via modern art. In the other, he would use Indian art in order to be modern. Either expedient might be valid, yet neither—and this was perhaps the crux—was wholly adequate to achieve the desired end. With the extinction of the artist as a unit in tradition, there was no longer any question of using an accredited style. The artist must express his innermost feelings. The style must be a man. Equally, his new status as a free personality—one who investigated himself rather than executed commissions—put a supreme stress on character. If there was no personality, there would also be no art. Questions of style—exact or detailed idioms, ways of portraying or modifying the human form, even of projecting feelings—must ultimately be left to himself. If he was Indian in sensibility, his Indian character would out. If he was modern in attitude, his style would be modern also. It would unconsciously blend with both modern and Indian art. Similarities and affinities might be present, but these would be incidental. The one prerequisite was confidence, the determination to cultivate original sensations and responses, the courage to express a personal ideal. It was because four Indian artists possessed strength of character that out of the false starts and brilliant theorizings of the first epoch came the modern art of the second.

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IV

Art and the Unconscious

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

THE first modern art to be produced in India was the work of the poet, Rabindranath Tagore. Born in 1861, he had received no technical training, and until 1928 had made hardly any incursions into painting at all. As a youth sitting in a lonely room in the family house at Jorosanko in 1890, he had filled a copy-book with sketches; and the artist, Mukul Dey, has related how one afternoon in April 1909 the poet 'with a mysterious smile on his lips' asked him to follow him to an upstairs room at Santiniketan. 'There he opened a drawer, pulled out a magnificent black leather-bound drawing book containing some head and figure studies from life, and handed the book to him.' These drawings included a sketch of Rabindranath's wife, perhaps the earliest surviving example of his drawing. Four years later Mukul Dey accompanied him to the Ramgarh Hills, and on this visit also Rabindranath made sketches of his daughter-in-law and of the artist himself. Later, in 1920, when an art school had been opened at Santiniketan, Mukul Dey states that Rabindranath 'inaugurated a competition of paintings, himself contributing pictures and becoming one of the judges of the competition'. These pictures, however, were his sole attempts at painting and, as the movement started by his nephew Abanindranath developed, it was in 'an envious mood of self-diffidence' that he watched it progressing, 'being thoroughly convinced that my fate had refused me passport across the strict boundaries of letters' (*My Pictures*). In fact, as he was later to confess, 'it was one of the greatest regrets of his life that he had not educated his hands or eyes or legs into doing things artistically. The delicacy of his fingers, the suppleness of his body—all had remained idle'.

If training in draughtsmanship was lacking, however, Rabindranath had other, more relevant qualifications for being an artist.

'Some people have asked me [he said in an address to the Royal India Society in 1930] "What was your preliminary training?" I can only say that my training was in words, not in lines. From my childhood I think I had an inborn sense of rhythm. Even when I did not fully understand poetry, verse, especially Sanskrit verse, had an intense satisfaction for me, and since then I have been doing nothing better than to turn out verse. I do not know what is in this task which gives one such a deep sense of ecstasy, but I believe the explanation is in the words themselves. Words are barren, dismal and uninspiring by themselves, but when they are bound together by some bond of rhythm they attain their significance as a reality which can be described as creative. We need not ask the question what they mean. They have something which appeals to our recognition. They have a reality; they have a value—a reality that is ultimate, and they have the quality of permanence.'

The same conclusion that rhythm is the essence of poetry is expressed in other words. 'Poetry is not a matter of feeling, it is the creation of form.' 'Rhythm is the creative force in the hand of the artist. So long as words remain in uncadenced prose form, they do not give any lasting feeling of reality. The moment they are taken and put into rhythm they vibrate into a radiance.' (*The Meaning of Art.*) 'Art like life revels in a rhythmic play of appearances for its own sake.' (*Lecture on Art at Teheran.*)

These views on rhythm had been accompanied by a profound understanding of the actual processes of poetic creation.

'Something felt within the heart tries to find shape as a poem.' (*Reminiscences.*)

'Ideas take shape by some *hidden subtle* skill at work within the poet.' (*Glimpses of Bengal.*)

'Whatever I truly think, truly feel, truly realise—its natural destiny is to find true expression. There is some force in me which continually works towards that end, but is not mine alone—it permeates the universe. When this universal force is manifested within an individual, it is beyond this control and acts according to its own nature; and in surrendering our lives to its power is our greatest joy.' (*Ibid.*)

'I can love, but I have not that which is termed by phrenologists "adhesiveness" or to be more accurate, I have a force acting in me, jealous of all attachments, a force that ever tries to win me for itself, for its own hidden purpose.' (*Letters to a Friend.*)

'It may seem to be egoistic. But this life-impulse I speak of belongs to a personality which is beyond my ego. . . . I must be true to it, even at the cost of what men call happiness, at the risk of being misunderstood, forsaken and hated.' (*Ibid.*)

'"A personality which is beyond my ego"'—such a phrase is a recognition of the mysterious, irrational forces on which artistic creation depends—a truth which Rabindranath was to state even more emphatically in the words, '"Art belongs to the region of intuition, the unconscious, the superfluous."'

These sentences show how fully Rabindranath had understood the nature of art and its creation, and when in 1930, three years after he had begun to paint, he attempted to justify his new activity, it was to his poet's education in rhythm that he turned.

'My pictures [he said] are my versification in lines. If by chance they are entitled to claim recognition, it must be primarily for some rhythmic significance of form which is ultimate and not for any interpretation of an idea or representation of a fact. The only training which I had in my young days was the training in rhythm, the rhythm in thought, the rhythm in sound.' (Foreword, dated May 1930, to an exhibition of his paintings.)

'One thing which is common to all arts is the principle of rhythm which transforms inert materials into living creations. My instinct for it and my training in its use led me to know that lines and colours in art are no carriers of information; they seek their rhythmic incarnation in pictures. Their ultimate purpose is not to illustrate or to copy some outer fact or inner vision, but to evolve a harmonious wholeness which finds its passage through our eyesight into imagination. Desultory lines obstruct the freedom of our vision with the inertia of their irrelevance. They do not move with the great march of all things. They have no justification to exist and therefore they rouse up against them their surroundings; they perpetually disturb peace. For this reason, the scattered scratches and corrections in my manuscripts cause me annoyance. They represent regrettable mischance, like a gapingly foolish crowd stuck in a wrong place, undecided as to how or where to move on.

But if the spirit of a dance is inspired in the heart of that crowd, the unrelated many would find a perfect unity and be relieved of its hesitation between to be or not to be. I try to make my corrections dance, connect them in a rhythmic relationship and transform accumulation into adornment. This has been my unconscious training.' (*My Pictures.*)

Such experiences, however significant, need not have produced an artist, and in order to understand why, at the age of sixty-seven, Rabindranath Tagore suddenly became a painter, we must consider several related circumstances. At the time when pictures 'began to flow from him like lava', he was already a gigantic figure in Indian literature. From 1875, poems, articles, lectures, stories and dramas had poured from his pen, and his poetry with its musical cadences and haunting melodies had come to dominate the Bengali consciousness. By 1925 he had been recognized for thirty years as possibly the greatest Bengali writer who had ever lived, and an aura of greatness seemed to surround everything he said or did.

This inherent greatness was fully recognized by younger men. Bishnu Dey has said:

'Tagore's tremendous genius and the range of his development can be compared almost to a natural phenomenon. It is a quite extraordinary event in the history of our culture. Literary parallels are of help only in approximation. He can be compared to Chaucer as a maker of the literary language of a people. But his temper is altogether different. Perhaps Goethe in Germany would be a nearer parallel, though he never had the occasional Germanic excesses nor the pagan acceptance of Goethe. He brought many new patterns in the confined but sharp music of Bengali culture, each of his hundred books is a step forward in technical mastery and in widening the boundaries of convention in subject-matter. The poet-romantic's nostalgia for change, the fire of romantic revolt and the power of reconstruction, a fine delicacy of the feelings are all his gifts to us. He gave us a sense of professional responsibility for the work of art. He helped us to acquire—some of us—a sense of privacy without which the consciousness of one's personality may not begin at all. The wholeness of this insatiable spirit through eighty years (with 2500 songs of endless variety) is indeed a unique phenomenon. It was this fire of the living spirit of man which is at the source of innumerable technical conquests, of irrepressible expansion of subject-matter; it was

In this bright song
Alone, alone in the fire
I go on creating my world of illusions—

as he sang and, at the close of this burning, in a curious transparency, he could almost leave his own background and become the greatest poet of the century, of modern life. His starry genius did indeed, again and again, spread down its arms out of its own nobility into our daily reality of men brought up on the soil of Bengal; yet fundamentally he is aloof, high above, self-sufficient in his generating void—like an event in Nature.'

The same impression of overwhelming greatness is conveyed by another brilliant young writer, Amiya Chakravarty.

'It was in my room in Ballygunge that I saw him first. Even to my adolescence, his ascetic but glowing countenance, his magnificent physique with its indefinable saintliness, and the warm vitality of his voice and movements conveyed an entirely new and rich concept of youth. I marked his bearing, majestic and spare, and his words carried a spiritual laughter giving to his conversation an iridescent freshness and gravity that I had not imagined possible. What he said I do not remember. All that I could fix upon was that here was a fully human person not unlike us or superhuman, but rather like what we really were but could not quite become. And I wondered at the strength which he carried so easily in reaching such perfect humanity. He was accessible, as great men are, needing no display of remoteness and radiantly sane. That picture yet remains with me: the picture of a very powerful and a very friendly sort of greatness.'

By 1927 such a greatness, gradually but decisively acquired, had given Rabindranath an inner confidence. In poetry he had constantly ignored tradition, trusting rather to his own instinctive feeling for poetic form. 'If only I could set utterly and boundlessly free this hampered life of mine, I would career away madly, like a wild horse, for joy of my own speed.' (*Glimpses of Bengal.*) And it was the same trust in his own powers which perhaps explains his sudden recourse to painting. Tradition might afford some clue to Indian modes of expression, but none impressed him as relevant to modern needs. Artists, he felt, must be allowed to break out in their own way and invent whatever forms they liked, and the fact that he himself had not undergone any previous training was no reason why he should not take to painting.

'When in the name of Indian art we cultivate with deliberate aggressiveness a certain bigotry born of the habit of a past generation, we smother our soul under idiosyncrasies unearthed from buried centuries. These are like masks with exaggerated grimaces, that fail to respond to the ever-changing play of life.' (*The Meaning of Art.*)

'I strongly urge our artists vehemently to deny their obligation carefully to produce something that can be labelled as Indian art according to some old world mannerism. Let them proudly refuse to be herded into a pen like branded beasts that are treated as cattle and not as cows.' (*Ibid.*)

'All traditional structures of art must have a sufficient degree of elasticity to allow it to respond to varied impulses of life, delicate or virile; to grow with its growth, to dance with its rhythm. There are traditions which in alliance with rigid prescriptions of rhetoric establish their slave dynasty, dethroning their master, the Life-urge, that revels in endless freedom of expression.' (*Art and Tradition.*)

'Let us take heart and make daring experiments, venture out into the open road in the face of all risks, go through experiences in the great world of human mind, defying unholy prohibitions preached by prudent little critics, laughing at them when in their tender solicitude for our safety they ask our artists to behave like good children and never to cross the threshold of their schoolroom.' (*Ibid.*)

The last two passages were admittedly written after he had already begun to paint, but they are none the less important statements of his general attitude. 'Endless freedom of expression' and 'daring experiments'—only a national figure sure of his own capabilities could have framed a programme with quite such vigour.

It is a second circumstance, however, which explains the kind of painting which he now produced. During his literary career Rabindranath had constantly vindicated India's right to independence, proving himself in this respect a fervid nationalist. But alongside patriotism he had also developed larger loyalties. In 1912 he had published an English translation of his poems, *Gitanjali*, and later had been awarded the Nobel prize for literature. This award had brought him world-wide recognition and from then onwards he had made a series of tours, visiting Europe, America and the Far East, lecturing on Indian culture and simultaneously enlarging his own outlook. He could still express his love for India in moving terms.

'My heart aches with longing to see the arms of my motherland extended into the sea with the palm-leaves rustling in the air.' (*Letters to a Friend.*)

'From over the seas the call of India haunts me. Not merely because from infancy my communion with the universe has been through India, but because in its rivers and plains, in its atmosphere and its light, I have received intimations of an immensity that has captivated my mind into adoration for ever. True, it causes me much suffering, the picture of desolation that is everywhere in the habitations of her people; yet, transcending it all, there is always with us the message of supreme liberation that has resounded in her skies from the beginning of time. On her lower levels, the bondage of pettiness, the fuss of triviality, the futility of meanness, is such as I have seen nowhere else; but on the heights where the altar of the Supreme is established, there is no bar against the invitation of the Infinite. That is why, for me, the peace of this morning keeps pointing with its light towards her.' (*Letters from Java.*)

Yet in no less decisive language he could qualify his attitude to nationalism. 'I love India but my India is an idea and not a geographical expression. Therefore I am *not* a patriot—I shall ever seek my compatriots all over the world.'

This detachment had obvious implications for art, and in a lecture delivered in America in 1920, he said, 'I have no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character', and he went on to defend contacts with the West as providing a valuable stimulus and shock. In 1925 he went much further and denied that Indian painting should remain conventionally Indian.

'There was a time when human races lived in comparative segregation and therefore the art adventurers had their experience within a narrow range of limits, deeply cut grooves of certain common characteristics. But today that range has vastly widened, claiming from us a much greater power of receptivity than what we were compelled to cultivate in former ages.' (*The Meaning of Art.*)

The Indian artist, in other words, should feel himself free to start from whatever point he liked; and although the writings of Rabindranath are silent on the subject, it is clear, from his own pictures, that he had studied modern art and had understood its principles.

A first pointer to his painting is provided by a paragraph published in *The Modern Review* as early as January 1917. This journal was already disseminating modern ideas, and in the issue in question it published an extract from an English article which has special bearings on Rabindranath's art. The article was entitled ' utomatic Drawing', and the authors, it stated, had

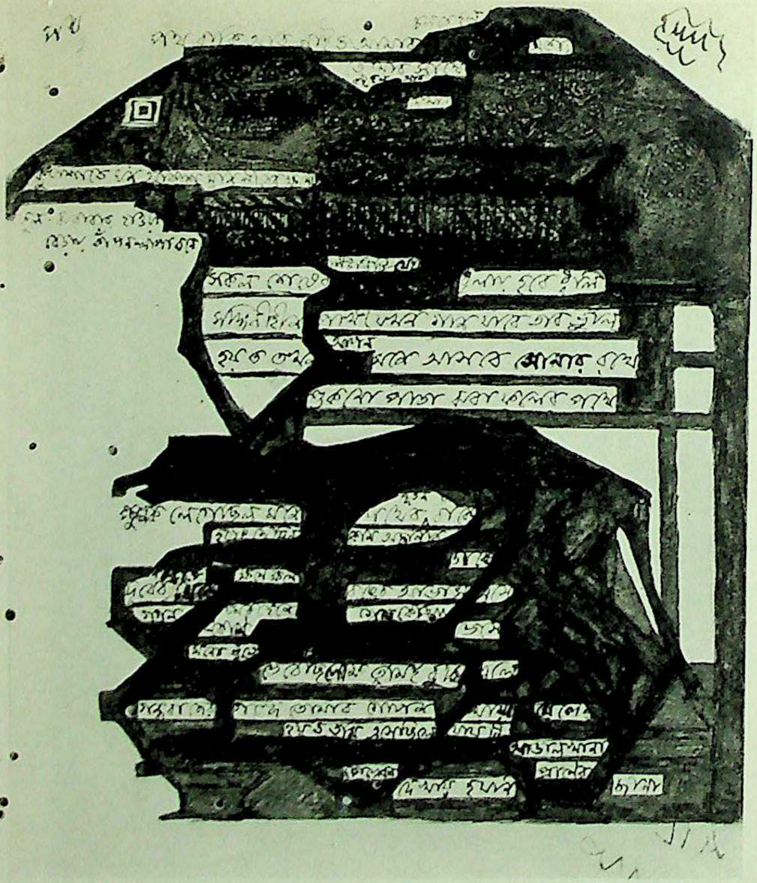
> 'applied the psychoanalytic theories of Freud, Jung and their school as an aid in releasing the cramped and suppressed imaginative fancies of the modern artist. An "automatic" scribble of twisting and interlacing lines permits the germ of idea in the subconscious to express or at least suggest itself to the consciousness. From this mass of procreative shapes . . . a feeble embryo of idea may be selected and trained by the artist to full growth and power. By these means may the profoundest depths of memory be drawn upon and the springs of instinct tapped. Yet let it not be thought that a person not an artist may by these means become one, but those artists who are hampered in self-expression may find in it a power and a liberty elsewhere undiscoverable.'

And the authors insist:

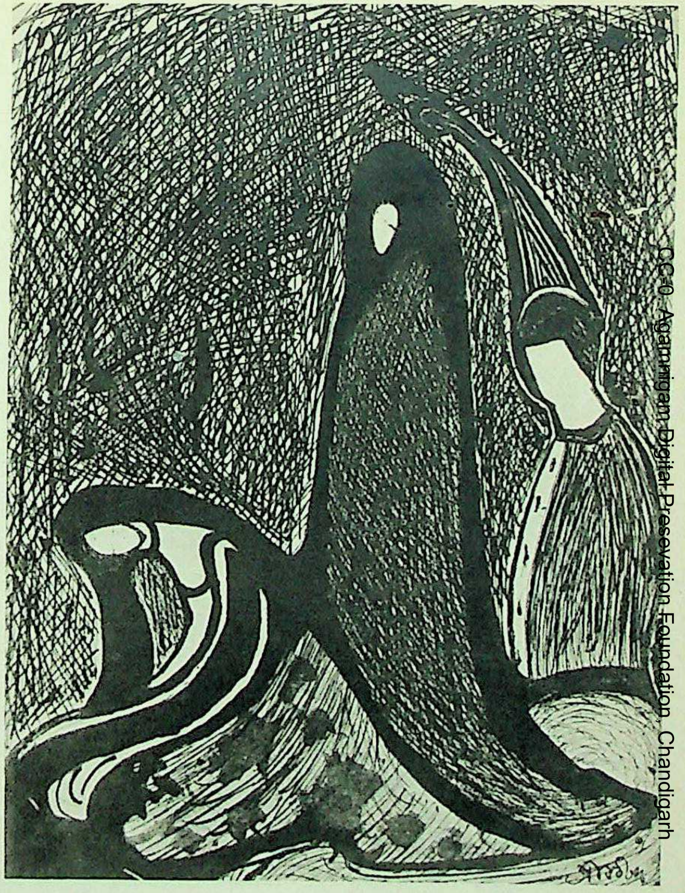
> 'The hand must be trained to work freely and without control by practise in making simple forms with a continuous involved line without after-thought, i.e. its intention should just escape consciousness. Drawings should be made by allowing the hand to run freely with the least possible deliberation. In time shapes will be found to evolve suggesting conceptions of forms and ultimately having personal or individual style.'

The same issue of *The Modern Review* contained an English translation of some of Rabindranath's letters, and so exactly does the passage foreshadow his methods that we must assume that he had noticed it and digested its contents.

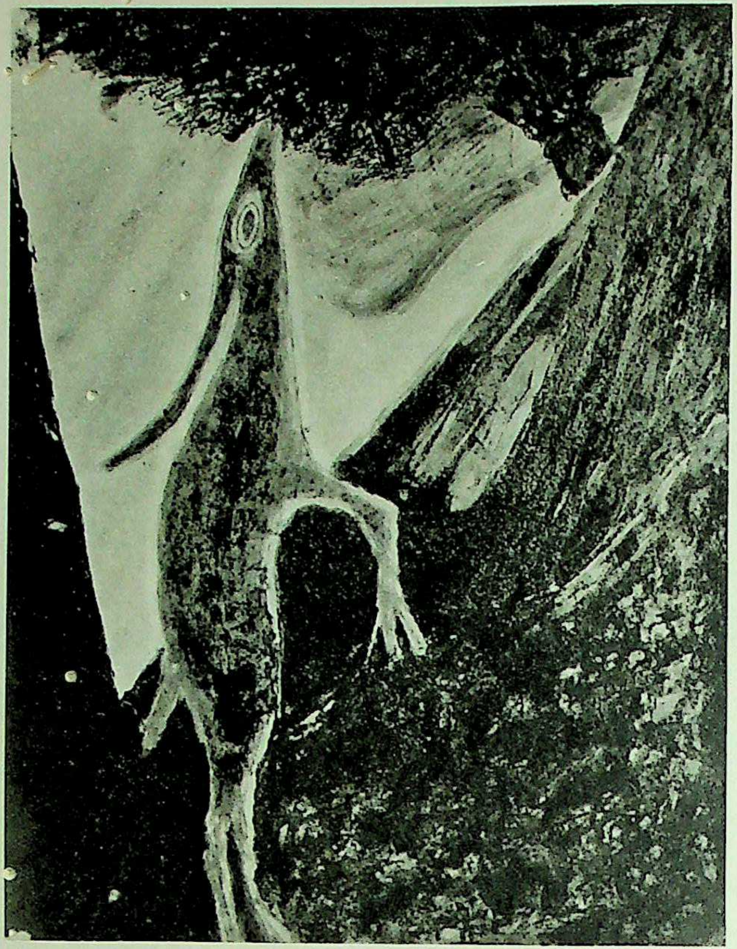
A second stimulus was somewhat different. In 1922 an exhibition of modern art took place in Calcutta, and among the pictures included was work by Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. Klee was represented by a picture, *Passing through an Open Door*, and Kandinsky by a picture, *Creation*. The exhibition was discussed by Stella Kramrisch in an article, 'The New Art in Europe', published in Rabindranath's own journal, *The Vishva-Bharati Quarterly*, and although there is once again no direct proof that he had seen the exhibition,



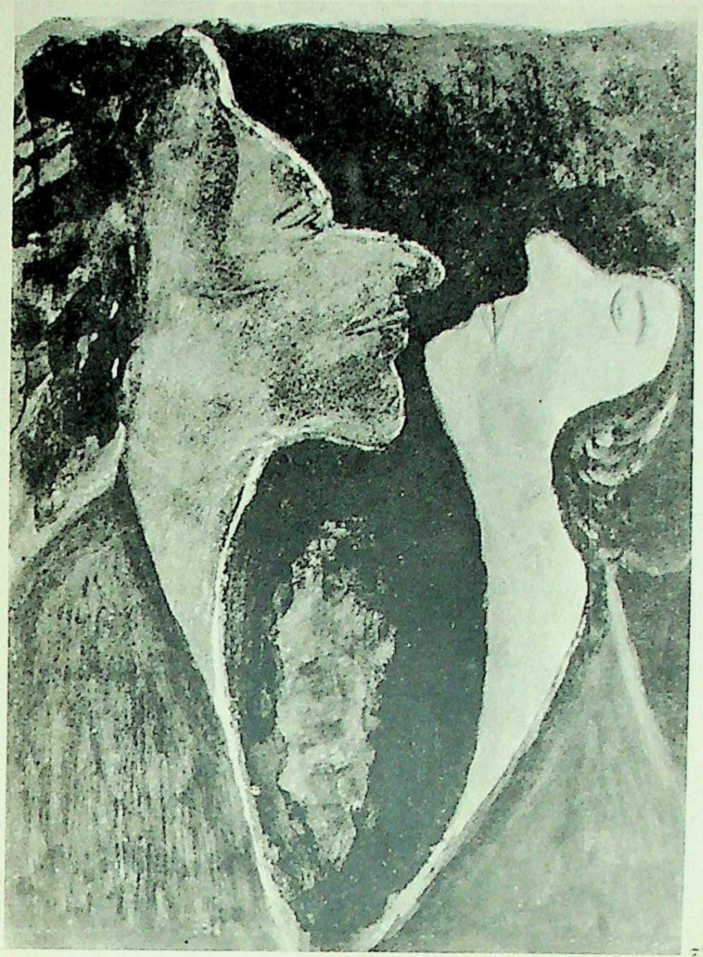
8. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
Erasure, *c.* 1927
Rabindra Sadana, Visva-Bharati, Bengal



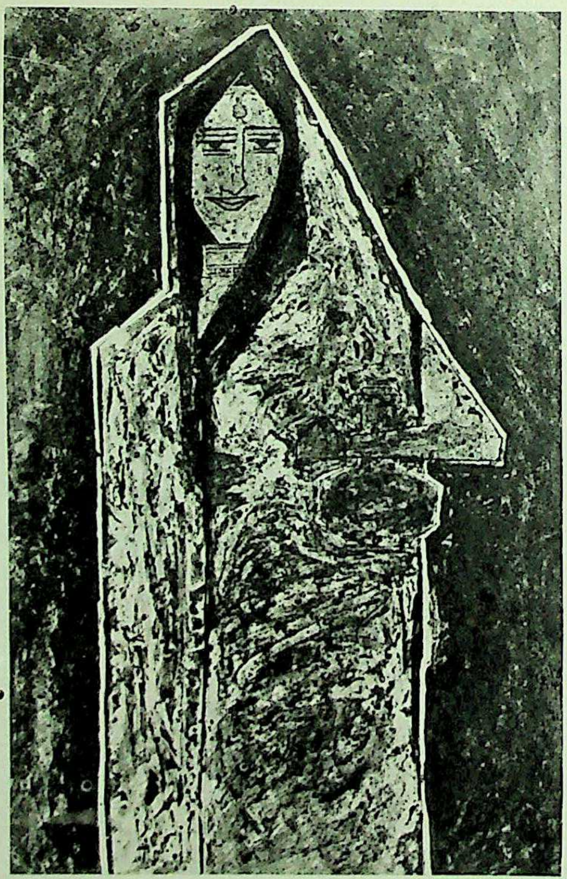
9. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
Black and White Threads
c. 1928—*c.* 1930. Rabindra Sadana, Visva-Bharati
Bengal



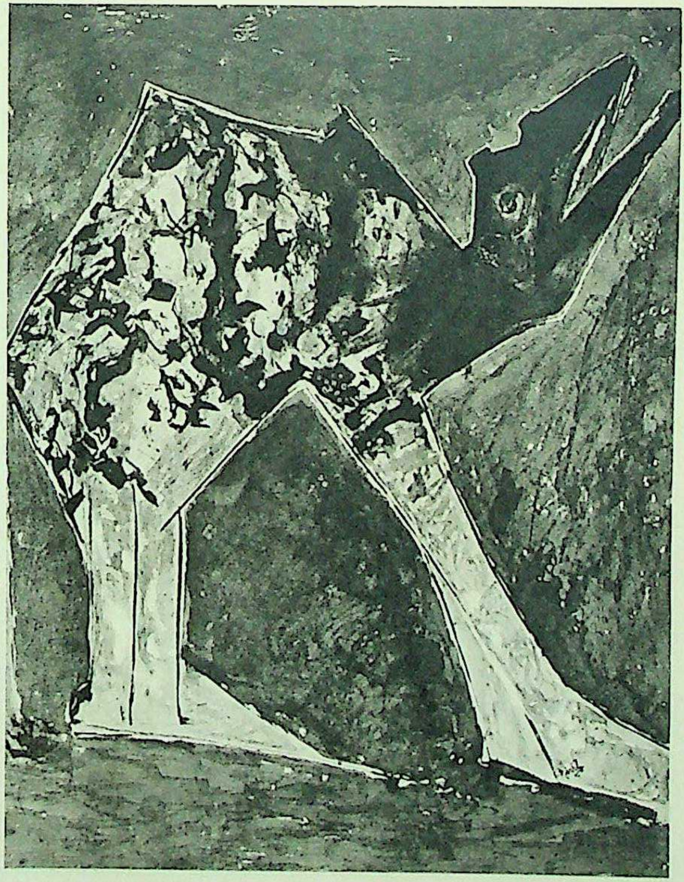
10. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
The Fawn, *c.* 1928–*c.* 1930



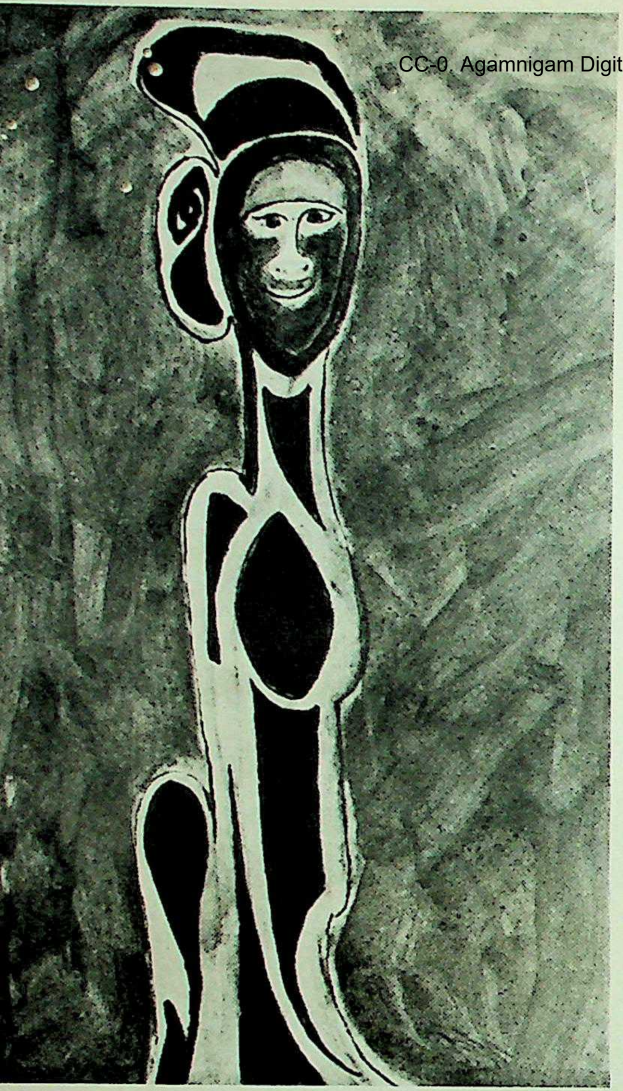
11. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
Beseeching, *c.* 1928–*c.* 1930



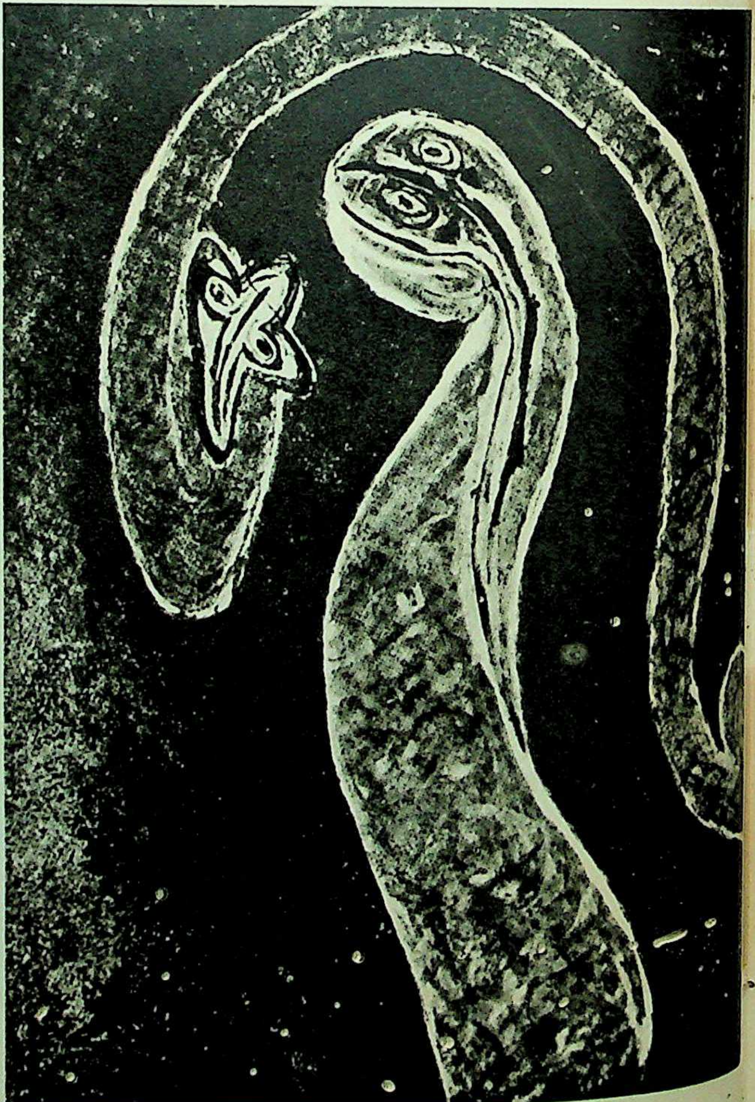
12. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
The Tender on the Stony Hard
c. 1928–*c.* 1930
Rabindra Sadana, Visva-Bharati, Bengal



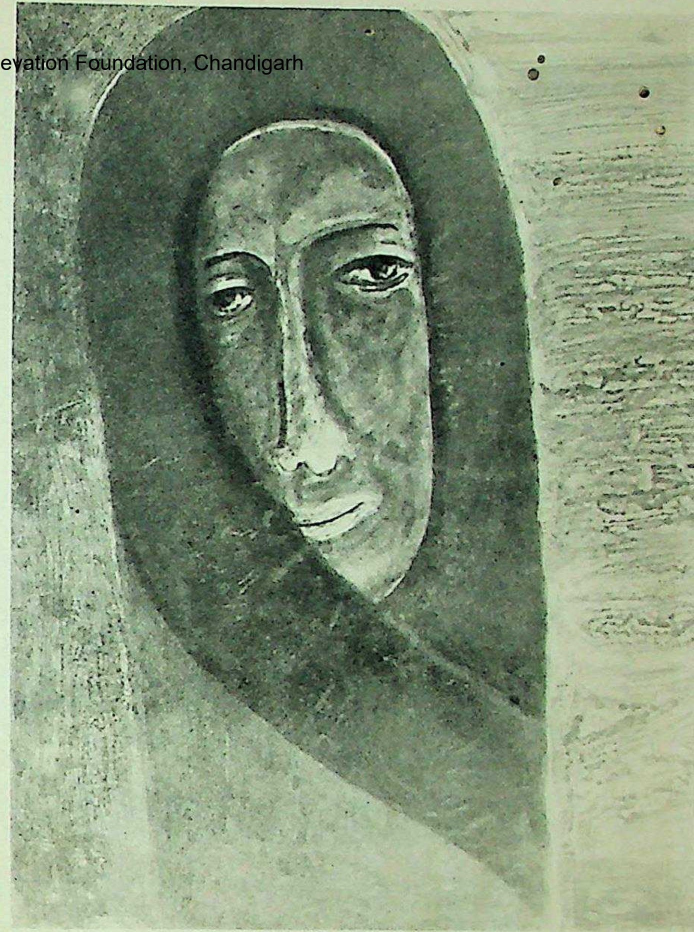
13. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
Agonized Cry, *c.* 1928–*c.* 1930
Rabindra Sadana, Visva-Bharati, Bengal



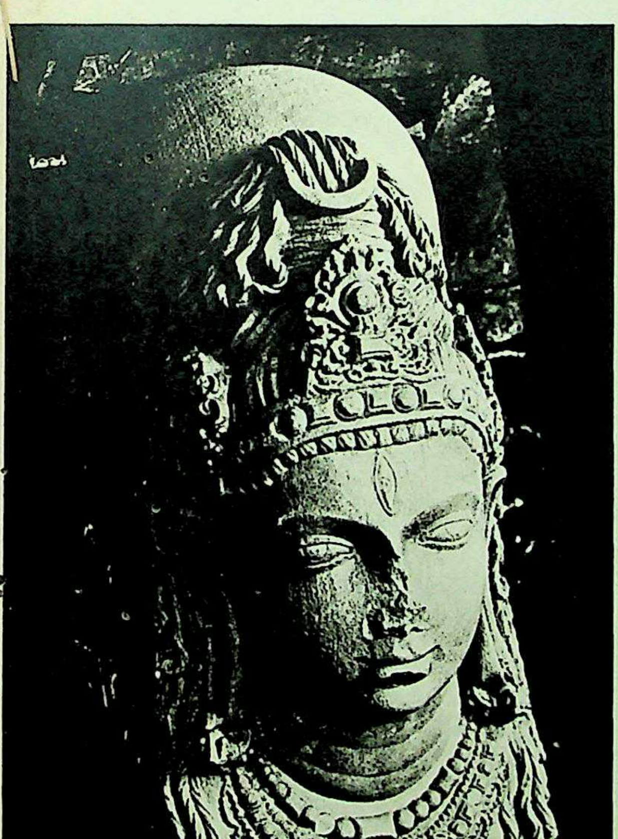
14. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
Drawing, *c.* 1928–*c.* 1930



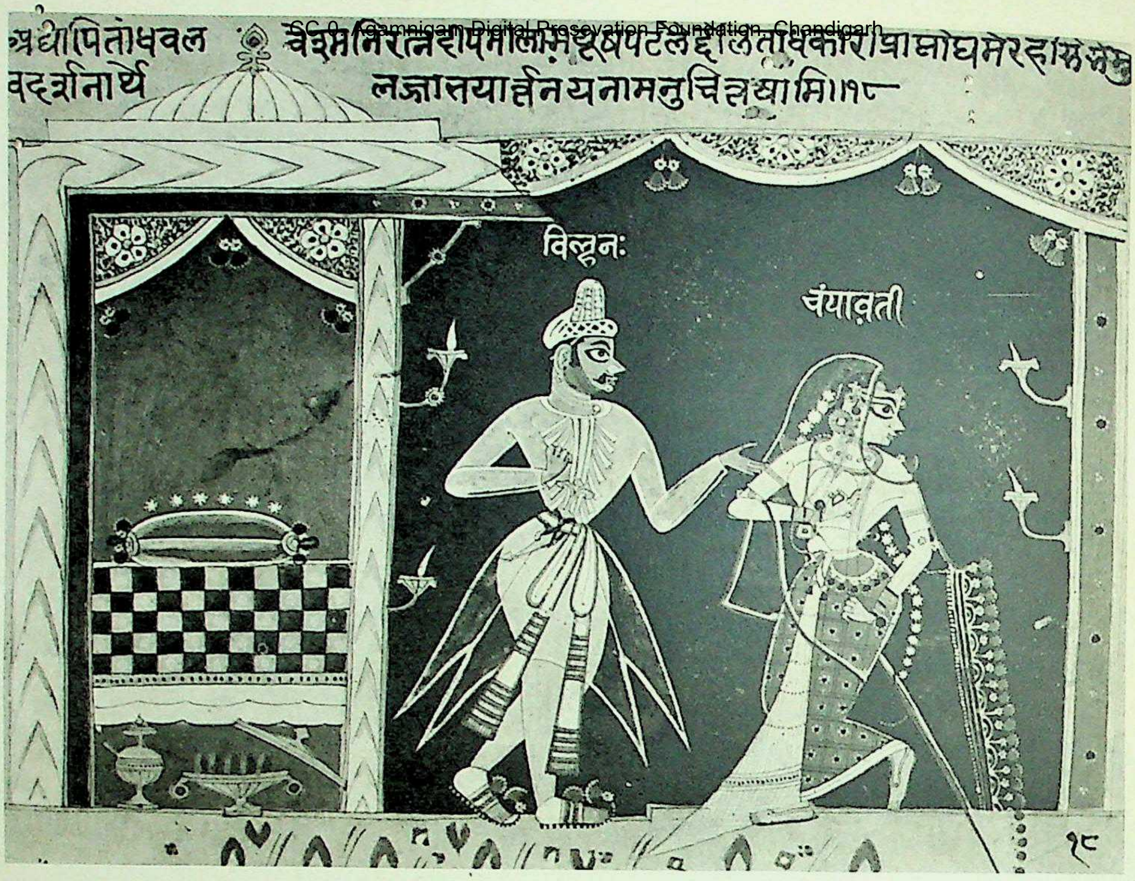
15. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
Drawing, *c.* 1928–*c.* 1930



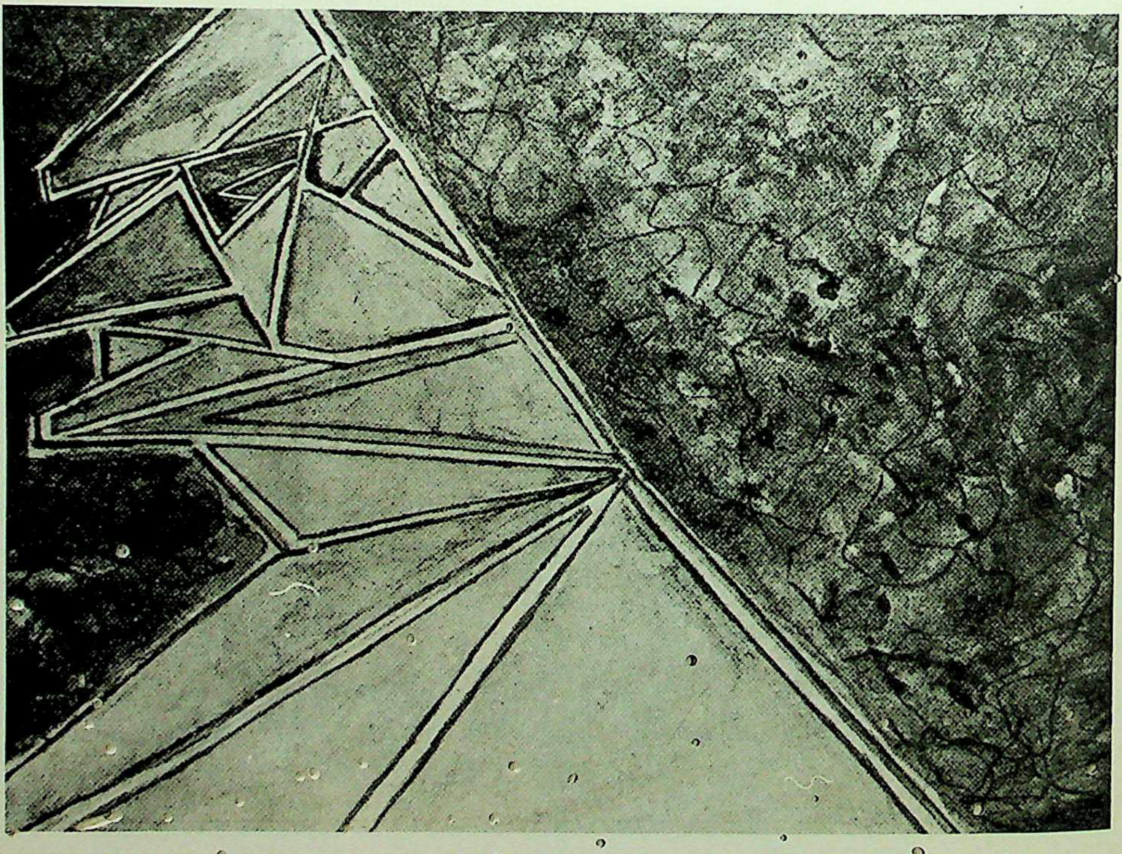
16. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
Veiled Woman
c. 1928–*c.* 1930



17. SIVA LINGAM
Bhumara, Nagod, Central India
sixth century A.D.


लज्जातयाहंनयनामनुचिंतयामि।।१८
विल्हनः
चंपावती
१८

18. The Lady and the Lover. Mandu, Central India, *c.* 1550. Collection N. C. Mehta



19. RABINDRANATH TAGORE. Drawing, *c.* 1928–*c.* 1930

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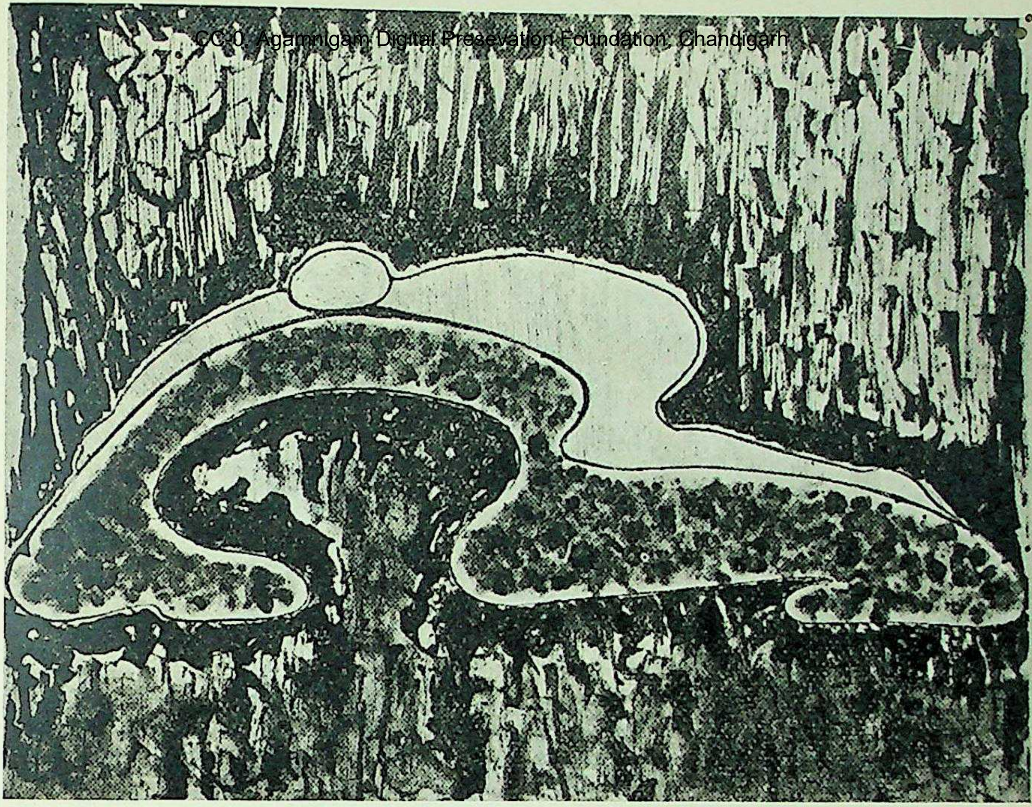
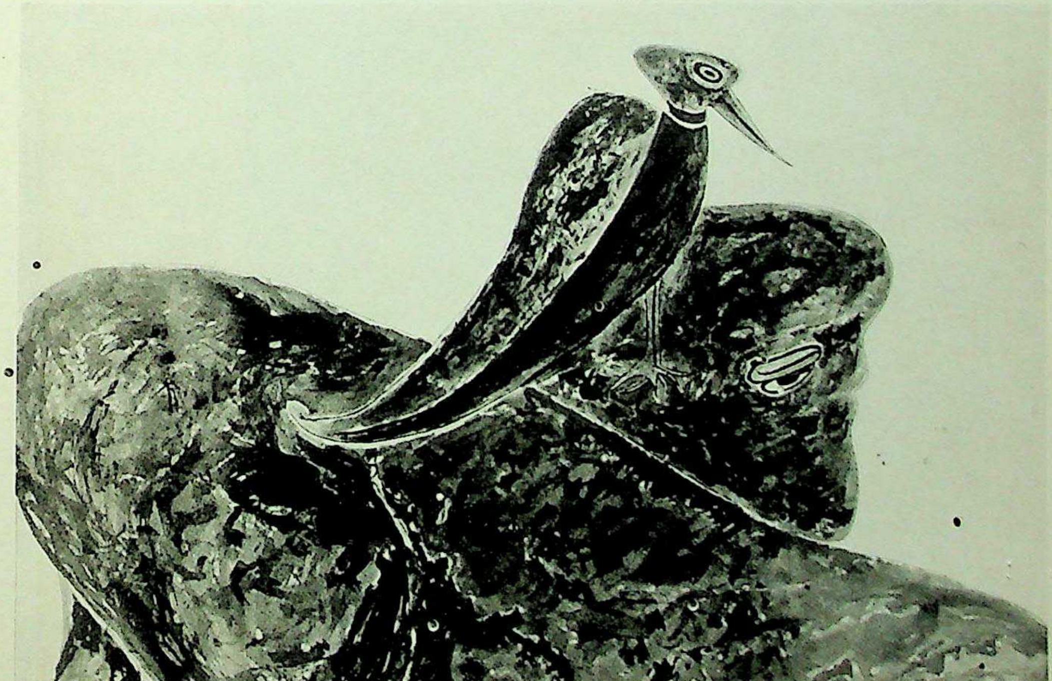
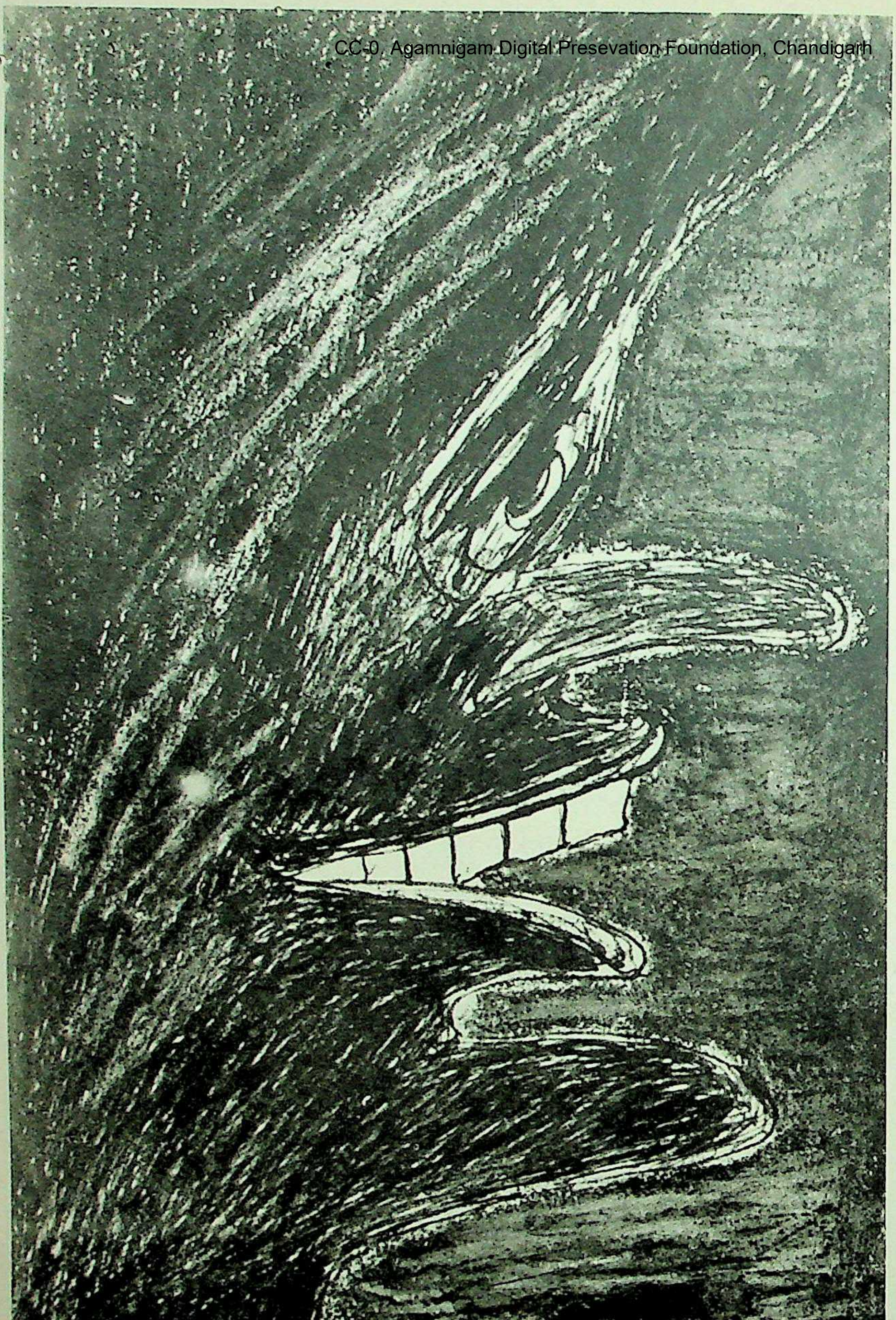


20. RABINDRANATH TAGORE. Drawing, *c.* 1928–*c.* 1930



21. RABINDRANATH TAGORE. Arrogant Bulk, *c.* 1928–*c.* 1930



22. RABINDRANATH TAGORE
Male Head, *c.* 1928–*c.* 1930
Rabindra Sadana
Visva-Bharati, Bengal

it is most unlikely that he failed to visit it. In her article Dr Kramrisch explained how Klee and Kandinsky were creating 'new forms and colour harmonies absolutely independent of natural forms and answering to their own emotional needs'. And we meet once more a direct foretaste of the kind of art which only six years later Rabindranath himself was to start to practise.

It was not until 1926, however, that he encountered modern art in all its abundance. During this year he visited Italy, France, Germany and England. No notes have been published to show exactly what pictures he saw, but the methods of three artists are so relevant to his own kind of painting that we can only assume that he had made some general contact with their work. The first artist is Klee, and in his work, there appear two of Tagore's most salient tenets.

> 'Klee is a type of personality whose mental functions are habitually based on feeling and whose relation to the perceptions which ensue is self-contained, introspective, subjective. In a type of this sort, the artist expresses himself in symbols which correspond to his inwardly apprehended feelings: he does not attempt to create symbols which correspond either to the objective correlates of his sensation (by imitating the appearance of what he sees) nor does he attempt to accommodate his feelings to a common language or invention. He creates symbols, as Klee once said, to reassure his mind. It is the typical form of musical expression, and that is why it came so easily to Klee.' (Herbert Read, *The Philosophy of Modern Art.*)

It is perhaps for the same reason that Rabindranath's own work came later to parallel Klee's art, for Rabindranath was a musician and their attitude to forms was equally close. Forms, in Klee's view, could not be expected to duplicate nature, for the very act of creation caused them to be reborn. But one point was essential.

> 'The heart must do its work undisturbed by reflective consciousness. Presumptuous is the artist who does not follow his road through to the end. But chosen are those artists who penetrate to the region of that secret place where primeval power nurtures all evolution. There where the heart of creation activates every function, who is the artist who would not dwell there? But not all can enter. Each should follow where the pulse of his own heart leads. In their time the Impressionists—our opposites of yesterday—had every right to dwell within

the matted undergrowth of every-day vision. But our pounding heart drives us down, deep down to the source of all.'

This passage was written by Klee in 1924, but not published in English until 1948. Yet it expresses with wonderful eloquence Rabindranath's own conception of a power outside himself—a reserve of superfluous energy—a heart of creation, spontaneously spilling over into a dance of form.

The same identity of outlook characterizes their views on content. Both artists concede a purely formal character to shapes and lines, yet both acknowledge that however 'abstract' a form may be, it also possesses realistic associations. Intellectual awareness or recognition is liable to occur, and the act of spontaneous growth is to that extent deflected. So aware, in fact, was Klee of this process that he described it as follows:

'With the gradual growth of an image before the eyes, an association of ideas gradually insinuates itself which may tempt one to a material interpretation. For any image of complex structure can, with some effort of imagination, be compared with familiar pictures from nature. Acceptance of this material association may suggest additions which once the subject is formulated clearly stand in essential relationship to it. If the artist is fortunate these natural forms may fit into a slight gap in the formal composition as though they had always belonged there.'

In such a process the picture came first, the subject later, the title last of all, and thus, for the third time, there is a remarkable coincidence in the methods of the two artists. For Klee, the title was at best an approximation to the subject, a comment on one of its aspects, a parallel in words to its prevailing mood or even a mere label serving by some startling quality of phrasing to suggest the original. For this reason, his pictures often received evocative or even witty titles as 'The Lord is my Shepherd', 'The Trout Stream', 'The Matter, Spirit and Symbol of the Attack', 'Tamer of the Wild Wolf's Milk Plant', 'Visionary Birdman', 'The Sensitive Ones', 'Flowers of the Night', 'Lady Demon', 'Stricken Town', 'God of the Northern Woods', 'Ceramic-Erotic-Religious', 'A Girl's Adventure', 'They're Biting'—phrases which like the subjects of the pictures were very far from being thought of when the pictures were begun. In a similar way, Rabindranath's pictures were given titles long after they were finished. For some years none of his pictures had titles at all, and as late as January 1932 he was declaring, in a letter to Ramanand Chatterjee:

'To give names to the pictures is absolutely impossible. I will tell you the reason. I do not draw after thinking of a subject. Accidentally the form of something of unknown family and character rises at the point of my moving pen—like the birth of Sita at the point of King Janak's plough-share. But it was easy to name that accidentally born single baby. But my picture-daughters are many—they have come uninvited. How can I count and identify them according to a register?'

A little later, while preparing certain pictures for reproduction, he slightly resiled from this position, going so far as to compose short poems. A picture of a bird surmounting an animal was given the lines 'Thou lightly carriest thy triumph, wingéd grace, over the ponderous unmeaningness of arrogant bulk' (Fig. 21). A gaunt rock-like personage prompted the reflection, 'The ancient whispers shut in a stony gesture carry the sadness of lost meaning'. A series of sprouting human forms had for text, 'The black and white threads weave the destiny of man into a mystery of entanglements' (Fig. 9). An angular animal with savage mouth stimulated the verse, 'Life chained to an imperfect mind sends its agonised cry' (Fig. 13), while the sweeping figure of a towering woman induced him to write, 'She is the woman ever strange to me and yet I seem to know her'. Tagore had no illusions about the inadequacy or even the irrelevance of such poem-titles, and in a poem prefacing the collection he described their functions in a way which might almost have been Klee's.

Lady of lines,
these words are not an alien invasion
come to set a limit to your realm.
They are but some noisy birds
that for a moment flit across your garden
while your meaning lies far beyond their chirpings.

Such affinities suggest how instructive may have been Tagore's tour of Europe. But Klee was not the only painter to afford a parallel, and when Rabindranath's pictures were exhibited in Germany a second name came instinctively to mind, that of the Norwegian, Edvard Munch. Munch is in many ways the opposite of Klee. His gaunt and haggard forms charged with tragic despair exude an almost virulent defiance. Distortions occur, but they are used to emphasize the bitter misery of his hapless types. At the same time, the style has an ugly ferocity which expresses through its savage biting manner a sense of harsh resentment. Munch, in fact, is Expressionism in its most belligerent form, and though Rabindranath's own gestures of defiance were to find more abstract shapes, some at least of his pictures employ exaggerated figures and charge them with sinister venom. The affinities of such pictures with those of Munch are too striking to be accidental, and we can only suppose that in his tour of Europe Rabindranath unconsciously imbibed something of Munch's manner.[1]

There remains a third artist. During the years 1925–34, Picasso's methods so exactly correspond to those of Rabindranath that at least some influence must be presumed, and we can gauge from a passage by Sir Herbert Read how deeply influential must have been Picasso's example.

'He does not know in advance what he is going to put on the canvas, nor does he decide what colours to use. He does not will to do anything, he does not seek to do anything. He allows his sensibilities a free rein, paints in a trance —a trance which has all the acuteness, the visual definiteness of dreams. His only care is to be faithful to what is given, to what is found, to paint what he sees. This transition to the creative is not easy to explain in general terms; but in Picasso's case it involves a renunciation of the will and a surrender to the promptings of the unconscious, which promptings, far from being decorative, are presumably symbolic. The later pictures of Picasso differ from his pure abstractions in that they do definitely represent "something". This something is often a strangely distorted female form; heads incomprehensively interlocked or dislocated; swollen forms in which one can still distinguish a stretched mouth, an occluded eye; vague rhythmical shapes which can be identified as a monstrous bust, a branch of leaves, a bowl of fruit, a guitar; gigantic sculptural figures built up with misshapen bones or of bones with some complex function, like the bones of the ear; forms foetal and nightmarish, actual and vital. The colours in these compositions are clear and strident; the composition usually simple and architectural. Such works of art cannot be rationally explained without some theory of the unconscious origin of imagery. In the state in which he admittedly paints these pictures, Picasso is obviously in the condition of day-dreaming, perhaps a condition of self-hypnosis. Apart from any aesthetic considerations, the value of such art will depend on the significance of the imagery which he brings to the surface and transfers directly to his canvas. What can be affirmed, on the evidence of many people who have seen such paintings, is that their imagery has a very haunting quality. Whatever the nature of the vitality expressed by Picasso, it has an undoubted power of fascination. I do not think the purely aesthetic qualities in the paintings—their colour harmonies and formal arrangements—can be dismissed as unimportant in the total effect. Picasso is too essentially an artist ever to betray his innate talent for form and colour and I should say this talent is all the surer for being exercised under purely instinctive conditions. The important qualification to make about such art is that it should be involuntary. To will is not enough. Conscious research is fatal. The artist must paint what he finds, he must not seek for something he has not found. "The genius of poetry", wrote Keats, "must work out its own salvation in a man. . . . That which is creative must create itself."' (*In Defence of Shelley* (London, 1936).)

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[1] Compare Fig. 11.

And it is these ideas which underlie the paintings of Rabindranath.

For many years the poet had taken a conscious pleasure in calligraphy, and his manuscripts are remarkable for the elegant neatness of his writing. During composition he often revised particular lines or phrases, but until 1927 limited his corrections to simple erasures. In 1928, however, he underwent a crisis. Mere crossings-out ceased to satisfy him, and he began, instead, to play with lines, 'rescuing', as he said, 'the scratches in his manuscript into a merciful finality of rhythm' and in the process developing them into rhythmical swirling shapes. This development is almost without precedent in Indian art, but a priest's cloth from Calcutta, reproduced in the *Journal of Indian Art* (September 1886), shows a similar building-up of forms from the letters and lines of a manuscript.

Playing with erasures, however, was merely a beginning, for Rabindranath found that lines suggested lines, forms suggested forms, and just as words developed their own musical rhythms during the making of a poem, a process of unconscious creation seized him. His first experiments are not of great importance—they are often little more than arabesques. It is rather as a clue to later structures that they warrant attention.

'Starting with horizontal crossings-out with thin threads of white between the black lines, a delicate surface was enclosed in an outline like a cartouche. Sometimes it extended over two lines. It was then as though the cartouche had become a capital. It was finished at the top by a torus which rested on an ogee, but if the lower line of erasure extended towards the left, the general form changed again. It stretched out into a beak or a keel and a bird was flying towards the west. Various erasures scattered over a page became so many islands, each one with its own form and volume. This archipelago of reserves rising out of the waters at the caprice of inspiration, sometimes was grouped in a corner and sometimes spread over a whole page bound together by the slender Hindu characters which looked like the crests of waves under a steady wind. Tagore had joined up these islands of erasures not by dead straight lines but by soft and flowing curves which seemed almost to breathe and the stylised erasures and linking curves made between them a single arabesque with masses and disconnections, nerves and flexures, all obeying organic law.' (Henri Bidou.)

These early experiments suggested later idioms, and Bidou stresses in particular the typical 'design in layers' which is obviously based on lines of writing and which also often gives the picture 'the appearance of masonry' (Fig. 8).

Experiments of this kind so fascinated Rabindranath that he rapidly discarded erasures as a starting-point and allowed himself an even freer range of invention. For several months he was content to use a fountain-pen, and only in 1929 began to exploit a variety of coloured inks. His instruments, however, continued to be simple. The end of a pen, a piece of rag, a fragment of cloth or even the tip of a finger were often his only ways of transferring ink to paper. Yet such crudities of 'brush' had compensating advantages, for there is often a mysterious subtlety of texture, an organic freshness in his pictures which partly derives from this method. At the same time, he began to compose more easily and freely and while his drawings continued to originate in a willing surrender to the unconscious, he now allowed more rational considerations to have at least partial play. In one erasure, for example, a number of small triangles and projections have been ultimately combined to suggest a figure with a receding forehead. The earlier stages of such a composition must certainly have been unconscious, but the final projection may well have been

State Museum, LUCKNOW.

deliberate. This intervention by the conscious or semi-conscious now became a part of the creative process. Lines and forms still came without conscious decisions or control while the process of projecting them on to paper still seemed to generate of its own accord a linear rhythm. When, however, a form had actually appeared, preconscious memories often asserted themselves, and a shape which had hitherto possessed few, if any, realistic associations was converted into an image—frequently of a dream-like bird or a wild fantastic monster. Occasionally forms were developed which were quite unlike any known animals, but which yet possessed an animal vitality of their own. Alternatively, casual likenesses to a subject were stressed and developed, and the former unconscious creation was elaborated or rationalized into a conscious or formal study. The drawings acquired, in fact, a double nature. The final identification—a woman, a bird, a deer—was often only a last-minute 'condensation' while the form itself was almost entirely the product of unconscious forces.

In this intricate process the coloured inks which he now employed played a subtle vitalizing part. Just as line had suggested line, colour suggested colour. Rhythm of line remained fundamental, but while the contours of forms were often nervously sensitive, colour now endowed them with a heightened, tenser clarity or charged them with a novel or a richer mystery. In a picture such as *The Tender on the Stony Hard* (Fig. 12), the rigid angular form is defined by a creamy brown outline, but it is the brooding darkness of the background and the light pinks and stony browns of the woman which gives the forms their separate identity. In another picture, *Phantom Face*,[1] there is a similar use of sharp contrasting tones. The blackish oval which forms the head is lightened by the smudged yellow of the face while the whole form is defined by a streak of cream and a brownish-scarlet background. In a third picture, *Agonized Cry* (Fig. 13), the background ranges from a sinister slatey blue to a sombre bluish black—the whole throwing up with brilliant clarity the animal's brown and yellow legs, its blackish-brown head and the black and scarlet stripes on the brown pelt.

In all these pictures the nominal subject is comparatively unimportant; though we shall probably not be far wrong if we connect some at least of his weird bird and animal creations with obsessions dating from his childhood. In *My Boyhood Days*, he says, 'devils and spirits lurked in the recesses of every man's mind, the air was full of ghost stories, and even the atmosphere was enmeshed in ghostly terrors'. The family house was at Jorosanko, and there 'in the dark rooms of the ground floor stood rows of huge water jars filled with the whole year's supply of drinking water. All those musty, dingy twilit rooms were the home of furtive "Things"—great gaping mouths they had, eyes in their breasts, and ears like winnowing fans; their feet turned backwards', and he goes on to describe the fascinated horror with which he visited the rooms. Out of these lonely explorations came a series of fantastic creatures which seem to have haunted Rabindranath throughout his life.

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[1] *Chitralipi* (Calcutta, 1940), I, pl. 2.

'For me East is the poet's East, not that of the politician or scholar. It is the East of the magnanimous sky and exuberant sunlight, where once upon a time a boy found himself straying in the dim twilight of child consciousness peopled with dreams. The child has grown but never grown out of his childhood.' (*Letters to a Friend.*)

Another experience, however, may also have led to his fascination with the macabre. One day, when he was still a child, his teacher took him with some friends to the dissecting-room of the medical college. The body of an old woman was stretched on the table. This did not disturb him. But an amputated leg which was lying on the floor upset him altogether. 'To view man in this fragmentary way,' he says, 'seemed to me so horrid, so absurd that I could not get rid of the impression of that dark unmeaning leg for many a day.' (*Reminiscences.*)

Such experiences—imaginary and actual—had one important effect. They accustomed Rabindranath to think of form as essentially 'unbeautiful'. The shapes which fascinated him were grotesque—they might even be described as 'Gothic'. The most powerful were also the most terrifying—the very reverse of what was conventionally regarded as graceful. And as a consequence, when he himself came to create, images that were disturbing and 'unbeautiful' appeared to him even more appropriate than those with sensuous attraction. 'Beauty,' he had said in 1919, 'has been the mere instrument (of art) and not its complete and ultimate significance. The true principle of art is the principle of unity.' (Lecture on 'Art in Personality'.)

How deep was this feeling for the 'ugly' is shown in his response to certain animals. Writing of elephants in 1894, he says:

'I love to look on these overgrown beasts, with their vast bodies, their immense strength, their ungainly proportions, their docile harmlessness. Their very size and clumsiness make me feel a kind of tenderness for them—their unwieldy bulk has something infantile about it. Moreover, they have large hearts. When they get wild, they are furious, but when they calm down, they are peace itself. The uncouthness which goes with bigness does not repel, it rather attracts.' (*Letters.*)

And even Nature struck him as a monster or an animal.

'The unsheltered sea [he wrote in 1885] sets me thinking of some tied-up monster straining at its bonds, in front of whose gaping jaws we build our homes on the shore and watch it lashing its tail, with waves swelling like the muscles of a giant!'

Or again, as in the following description of a storm (June 1892):

'Swollen masses of the deepest indigo blue were piled, one on top of the other, just above the horizon, looking like the puffed-out moustaches of some raging demon. Under the jagged lower edges of the clouds, there shone forth a blood-red glare, as through the eyes of a monstrous sky-filling bison, with tossing mane and with head lowered to strike the earth in fury.'

These subjects give to many of his pictures a peculiar horrific aura. Yet in any total assessment they are obviously not of great importance. Klee himself had realized that in employing the conscious to edit what was basically the work of the unconscious, a series of totally different effects might result, and his own work contains a number of sharply contrasting types—the witty, metaphysical, fantastic, poetic, sexual, symbolic. Indeed it would seem to be an inherent hazard of automatic art that in the crucial stages of precipitation the final effect may be either banal or mysterious, comic or tragic, trivial or complex. The value of the picture, in fact, will hinge on the exact relationship between the style of painting—its lines, forms and colours—and the particular associations, emotional or intellectual, set in train by the imagery. The style of the artist, his attitude to forms, indeed his whole approach to art, may be constant; the final effects totally dissimilar.

With such varied possibilities it was inevitable that out of a huge production of almost three thousand pictures many of Tagore's creations should fail to achieve strong symbolic or emotional significance. Wastage and failure on a large scale are essential concomitants of the method—a point which is only too evident in the case of Klee himself. In fact, it is only in a certain hard core—a group of pictures which mysteriously realize their own inherent possibilities—that we discover signs of greatness. And, in Rabindranath's case, such pictures are all linked to a certain emotional attitude and the special imagery which seems to have accrued from its presence. In his novel *Shesher Kabita*, written in 1928, Tagore tried to satirize those younger writers who were supposedly in revolt against himself.

> 'My second contention against the poet Tagore [a character says] is that his creations even like his handwriting are full of curves reminding one of roses and female forms and floating moons! Primitive! Trying so to copy Nature's idioms. From the new literary dictator we expect creations, straight and sharp —like thorns, like arrows, like spear-heads. Not like fragile flowers, but like the lightning flash and the pain of neuralgia, piercing and angular like a Gothic church, not rounded like a mosque dome; not self-complacent but aggressive; even if they be crude like a jute-mill or a government secretariat. Let us disenchant ourselves from the witchery of musical forms.'

There is no evidence that this passage was written in connexion with his own art, but of all Tagore's paintings it is precisely those which embody this very kind of imagery which constitute his greatest achievement. In this hard and vital core, 'roses and female forms' are absent and instead there is a constant liking for angular geometry, for smooth upward-thrusting shapes, for gaunt ovoids, for protruding beaks, teeth and noses and slimly pointing triangles. In *The Tender on the Stony Hard*, for example, the woman's shape is as rigidly vertical as a spear-head while her veil closely resembles a jagged crystal. In *Phantom Face*, the basic form is like a smoothly tipped post, while in *The Eyes Seeking for the Enigma*[1] a similar erect shape thrusts firmly upwards. In *The Bird of the Fairyland*,[2] a curved beak slants upwards to a jagged crest. *Ancient Whispers*[3] discloses a tall erect figure, angular as a rock and once again surrounded by savage crystalline points, while in a drawing called *The Black and White Threads* (Fig. 9) not only is the tall hooded figure yet again present, but the form behind it wears a long beak-like hat. *Agonized Cry* (Fig. 13) and *The Cave of the Primitive*[4] employ the same kind of angular upward-thrusting forms as *The Tender on the Stony Hard* (Fig. 12), while *The Meeting of Hearts*,[1] *The Day's Gains*[2] and *Strange Woman*[3] contain the same uprearing forms, slim and rigid as a thrusting pole.

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[1] *Chitralipi*, I, pl. 4. [2] *Ibid.*, pl. 6. [3] *Ibid.*, pl. 7. [4] *Ibid.*, pl. 14.

Such imagery—both in the prose quotation and in the pictures—is notable for two distinct qualities—its inescapably phallic character and its all-pervading air of aggressive defiance. For certain reasons, Tagore seems to have been compelled to express a harsh and savage attitude to life—an attitude the very reverse of what we would expect from his gentle demeanour—and at the same time to express it through shapes which are boldly, even stridently, sexual. There are clearly two problems to be solved—the problem of why so strong an impulse to aggression should so suddenly have appeared and the problem of why in this small core of pictures the shapes should possess such clear associations.

The first problem can perhaps be resolved by considering for a moment his private position at the time when he took to picture-making. In 1928 he was sixty-seven—an age when, by ordinary Indian standards, he would already be nearing death. His own powers were still intensely vital, but his health was failing—'I seem to be living in the dusk of a dimmed existence,' he wrote to Rothenstein in 1926—and it is possible that confronted with imminent old age he felt an overwhelming need to assert his vitality. The phenomenon is not unknown in literature and we have only to recall the cases of W. B. Yeats and Edith Sitwell to realize how a sudden accession of poetic energy may characterize old age. In the case of Rabindranath, two further circumstances may possibly have encouraged this attitude. Although he was now a world figure, his greatest literary phase was over, and in Bengal he was beginning to be respected more for his past achievements than for any continuing power. Outside India the situation was far worse. In many countries he was admired as a philosopher and mystic, but in England his reputation as a writer had gradually declined. Writing to Rothenstein in 1931, Edward Thompson said:

'He won't get justice now—nothing could get him justice. Leonard Woolf, for example, in the *Nation*—a paper very friendly to India—said there was not a single quotation in my book which did not seem to him altogether worthless. But he ought to have seen the daemonic energy and fierceness of

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[1] *Chitralipi*, I, pl. 10. [2] *Ibid.*, pl. 13. [3] *Ibid.*, pl. 15.

Sea-Waves, if of nothing else. A literature in which every poet was like T. S. Eliot and every novelist like E. M. Forster would be fairly arid. We do need less narrow canons of criticism. . . . My disappointment over the loss of reputation that has come to Tagore is largely because he lost the best chance an Indian has ever had of getting a hearing from the West. He got the ear of England—and then lost it. He lost much more than his own battle. And he need not have lost it.'

It is possible that Tagore himself was aware of this lost reputation and, still superbly confident in his own creative powers, was saddened by its seeming injustice. There is certainly an element of sadness in some of his pictures, and in one of them, *Veiled Woman* (Fig. 16), the proudly phallic form shielding a woman's head is filled with mournful majesty. For this painting, Tagore wrote the lines

> The pain has ceased though its pathos lingers
> Like a still evening at the close of a rain-loud day

and we can hardly doubt that in these lines he was expressing something of the tragedy inherent in his own position. Yet such a sadness was purely incidental, for what is far more significant was his proud refusal to admit eclipse. We must assume a growing resentment against life for failing him, but also a growing resentment against critics and the public for failing to recognize his continuing stature. It was as if he sensed a conspiracy of evil, and in the face of those who were either frankly hostile or dimly neutral, defiance seemed the only appropriate attitude. In these pictures, filled with snarling monsters and flint-like figures, life in all its animal intensity seems to rise up, throw back those who would deny his greatness and assert once more his vital originality.

The other circumstance may well have been political. We must presently consider in greater detail the progress of Indian nationalism and its impact on current thought. What is clear is that between the Indian mind repressed and frustrated by the British Raj—a mind denied fulfilment by a seemingly hostile environment—and Tagore's own situation, a great poet confronted by a dwindling audience, there is an obvious similarity. Defiance of life and of the critics may partly explain the aggressive attitudes embodied in the paintings, but the general situation may well have given them wider relevance.

Such circumstances explain in part Tagore's arrogant defiance, but why, it will be asked, should sexual imagery have provided the means for its expression? The answer will depend on what particular psychological theory is adopted, but if we follow Freud it is clear that, being once committed to the exploration of the unconscious, Tagore could hardly have achieved a very different content. Freud has shown that symbolism is an integral part of the unconscious imagination, and that whether revealed in dreams, riddles or poetry the unconscious is mainly preoccupied with sexual issues.

'The more one is occupied with the solution of dreams, the readier one becomes to acknowledge that the majority of the dreams of adults deal with sexual material and give expression to erotic wishes.'

And he adds:

'Let us recognise at once that there is nothing astonishing in this fact, which is entirely consistent with the principles of dream-interpretation. No other instinct has had to undergo so much repression, from the time of childhood onwards, as the sexual instinct in all its numerous components; from no other instinct are so many and such intense unconscious wishes left over, which now in the sleeping state, generate dreams.'

It is clear that in other artists who have adopted this method, imagery of the same kind has often resulted—Klee, Miro and Picasso are special cases in point—while poets such as Lorca and Dylan Thomas illustrate how valid is the same thesis for certain types of poetry.

If such a tendency is assumed, we can perhaps go one stage further and concede a second proposition. Granted that in all adults this type of feeling is partly repressed, those who no longer lead an adventurous life will require more imaginative fulfilment than those whose passionate urges are more directly expressed; and if, in addition, these persons are abnormally sensitive, they will seek an even greater relief through the medium of the unconscious. And it is this process which would seem to have occurred in the case of Tagore. There is no doubt that he was keenly sensitive to love.

We hasten to gather our flowers lest they be
   plundered by the passing winds
It quickens our blood and brightens our eyes to
   snatch kisses that would vanish if we delayed
Our life is eager, our desires are keen.

The Gardener

The shadow of the coming rain is on the sands and
 the clouds hang low upon the blue lines of the
 trees like the heavy hair above your eyebrows
I know well the rhythm of your steps, they are
 beating in my heart
Come, O come to my lake, if you must fill your pitcher.
Ibid.

Your flitting love lightly brushed me with its wings
My sunflower
And never asked it if was ready to surrender its honey.
Fireflies

Thy shy little pomegranate bud,
Blushing today behind her veil
Will burst into a passionate flower
Tomorrow, when I am away.
Ibid.

Maiden, thy beauty is like a fruit
Which is yet to mature
Tense with an unyielding secret.
Ibid.

O who is she on the king's tower that has loosened
The braid of her dark hair
Has drawn over her breasts the blue veil
And starts and runs in the sudden flashes of lightning
And lets the dark hair dance on her bosom?
My heart dances like a peacock
The rain patters on the new leaves of summer
The tremor of the cricket's chirp troubles the
 shade of the tree
The river overflows its bank
Washing the village field
And my heart dances.
The Modern Review, Sept. 1929

And even his poem, *The Kopai*, treats the river as if it were a girl filled with sexual charm.

'I have for my neighbour the river Kopai. Her primitive name is mixed up with the loud-laughing prattle of Santal women. There is no gap for discord between the land and water in her intimacy with the village and she easily carries the whisper of her one bank to the other. The blossoming flax field is in indulgent contact with her as are the young shoots of rice. Her vagrant stream is unjealous of the green and golden wealth of the earth. Slender is her body that glides in curves across shadows and lights, clapping hands in a tripping measure. In the rains her limbs become wild like those of the village girls drunk with the mahua wine, yet she never even in her wantonness breaks or drowns her neighbouring land; only with a jesting whirl of her skirts sweeps the banks where she runs laughing loud. By the middle of autumn her waters become limpid, her current slim, revealing the pallid glimpse of the sands underneath. Her destitution does not shame her, for her wealth is not arrogant, nor her poverty mean. They carry their own grace in their different moods, even as a girl when she dances with all her jewels aglimmer or when she sits silent with langour in her eyes and a touch of a tired smile on her lips. The Kopai in her pulsation finds its semblance in the rhythm of my poet's verse, the rhythm that has formed its comradeship with the language rich in music and that which is crowded with the jarring trivialities of the work-a-day hours.' (*Vishva-Bharati Quarterly*, New Series I, May 1935.)

This pleasure in sensuous experiences was paralleled by the rapture which he felt at Santals. Around his home at Santiniketan lived colonies of this lovely aboriginal people. Santal women, with glossy dark brown skins, would move freely in the fields and, watching their movements, Tagore surrendered to 'their healthy grace', 'the beautiful harmony of their figures and movements' and 'the vigorous cleanliness of their limbs'.

'The Santal woman [he wrote] hurries up and down the gravelled path; a grey sari closely twines her slender limbs, dark and compact; its red border sweeping across the air with the flaming red magic of the palash flower. Some absent-minded divine designer while fashioning a black bird with the stuff of the July cloud and the lightning flash must have improvised unawares this woman's form; her impulsive wings hidden within, her nimble steps uniting in them a woman's walk and a bird's flight. With a few bangles on her exquisitely modelled arms and a basket full of loose earth on her head she flits across the gravel-red path. The lingering winter has finished its errand. The casual breath of the south is beginning to tease the austerity of the cold month. The ripe fruits are strewn over the grove where the rowdy boys crowd to pillage them. The building of my mud house has commenced and labourers are busy raising the walls. I sit on my terrace watching the young woman toiling at her task hour after hour.' (*Vishva-Bharati Quarterly*, New Series, May 1935.)

These descriptions show how keenly Tagore responded to physical charm—a response which he made even clearer in his remarks on puritanism.

'When I find man imposing upon his society a mutilation of mind, a niggardliness of culture, a puritanism which is spiritual penury, it makes me inexpressibly sad. Whatever may be the case in other countries, we need in India more fullness of life and not asceticism.' (*Letters to a Friend.*)

Such attitudes, in other artists, might well have led to romantic experiments, yet, possibly because he valued his poet's character too keenly to risk its disruption, Tagore seems to have remained aloof—his sensibility nervously alive, his personality withheld. This situation would inevitably exacerbate any tendencies to repression which already existed, and when he began to paint, the same passions, interests and enthusiasms would emerge. It was in such a state of mind, heightened by resentment at failing homage, complicated by feelings of self-pity yet spurred to protest by his inner sense of greatness, that he produced his most important pictures.

Between 1928 and 1930 Tagore's greatest pictures were painted—all three years being marked by intense creative activity. The fact that only a small core achieved greatness is of no account, for Tagore himself had always posited 'a magnificent wastefulness' about creative life. What is important is that in painting these pictures two conditions had been necessary—humility before the promptings of the unconscious and a passive recording of what was spontaneously offered. And it was precisely these conditions which after 1930 abruptly disappeared. The sudden recognition of his importance as an artist—first by foreign critics and then by Indian—destroyed his humility, and in its place there arose a firm conviction of his artistic genius. Addressing the Royal India Society in London in 1930, he said:

'I have been asked to say something about these pictures but I really do not know what to say about them. The desire to draw came suddenly and until I arrived in Europe I had very great diffidence about the merit of these pictures but I was encouraged by some artists whom I chanced to meet when I was in the South of France. They showed very great enthusiasm for my drawings and insisted upon my exhibiting some of them in Paris. I tried to know what was in these pictures which would explain the enthusiasm of the reception given to them. One authority told me that I had achieved something in these pictures which their own artists had been trying to achieve without success. I could not believe it myself but there it is; the observations were made by experts belonging to a people who are very critical and who can indulge in what may be termed the cruelty of laughter. Bearing these things in mind, I came to the conclusion that I might have some little faith in my own powers as an artist.' [And he went on] 'In the last year or two I have found in drawing a means for the expression of reality. The discovery has given me intense satisfaction and pride—a pride such as the artist should have in his achievement. I shall not be turned aside from my satisfaction if it is remarked by some people that a poet should keep to his verse and not bother about the making of pictures, for I am proud to have been told by some of the great critics of Europe that my pictures are better than the work of some of the well-known artists of the day. You will think that I am growing more and more vain as I grow older. Well, I can only plead the excuse that painting is new to me and that I have not yet grown used to and hardened in this form of expression.'

In this address there are already a number of phrases ill calculated to maintain humility; and its reverse, an overweening vanity, was fatally strengthened by reactions to his pictures in Germany and Russia. At Hamburg a critic declared:

'The exhibition shows us the latest manifestations of Tagore as an artist, namely as a painter. We are overwhelmed by the newness and originality of subject and of its expression. His pictures bring to the comprehension of all the world a strange magic of a far off world, and he may become yet more a mediator and interpreter between Germany and India.'

At Berlin it was stated, 'he attains a level of art that nowadays is quite extraordinary. After half a year of despairing deceptions this exhibition of paintings and drawings of an Indian poet is the first outlook'; and at Dresden, 'It is hardly known to the world that the great Indian poet is also a master of colour and line. May the world convince itself of his work.' But it was in Moscow that the most extravagant praises were heaped upon him.

'Critic: What is remarkable in your work is the spirit of youth and that is why these paintings are so interesting. The spirit of youth meets no difficulty in finding its proper mode of expression and your pictures have created their own technique. Have you ever painted before?

'Tagore: Never.

'Critic: You are a first-class artist. Every new picture makes a stronger impression; the entire audience is thrilled by this. . . . We shall be glad to take your paintings and exhibit them as our own—as those of a Russian artist. We ask whether your paintings have any names?

'Tagore: None at all. I cannot think of any names. I do not know how to describe my pictures.

'Critic: Professor Kristy was struck by the virility of the paintings he had the pleasure to see. He is sure that your paintings represent a very great event in the history of art. He believes your pictures will have a deep effect on our artists and give them a fuller sense of life.

'Tagore: It gives me great delight to be able to earn your approbation and to know that this came from the expert critics and artists of your land. I almost feel vain of my productions. My pictures being too new, I am not yet accustomed to this and I always feel the greatest delight when they are praised because I have some diffidence in not having any standard within myself, and have to rely upon those who have a great background of artistic experience.' (*Rabindranath in Russia.*)

These encomiums proved too much for Tagore. In March 1930 he still felt misgivings and wrote to Rothenstein admitting that the strangeness of his pictures might be born from his 'utter inexperience and individual limitations'. By 1931 this mood had gone. From then until 1941, the year of his death, he painted and drew as if, even by academic standards, he was 'a first-class artist' and his pictures 'a great event in the history of art'. 'This painting,' he wrote to Rothenstein in 1938, 'has become a regular playmate of mine.' He scoured art-books for ideas, he drew from life, he copied flowers and sketched landscapes, abandoning in the process the very method which had led to his most poetic and powerful pictures. The result is what we might expect—a phase of painting, banal and incompetent, feeble and trivial. Indeed, apart from very occasional reversions to his earliest methods and a few scattered inspirations, it is only between 1928 and 1930 that his painting proved of value.

So mixed an achievement raises the difficult question—What, in last analysis, was Rabindranath's actual contribution to modern Indian painting? By those committed to the neo-Bengal movement, his first experiments were regarded as the amiable follies of an ageing poet, and it was not until the tour of Europe in 1930 when his pictures were acclaimed by foreign critics that artists in India admitted that his pictures might be serious contributions to modern art. Even then his abrupt change of method introduced a confusing element. As late as 1937 he could write to Rothenstein declaring how much he was enjoying his role of painter, 'With the ruthless freedom of an invader, I have been playing havoc in the complacent and stagnant world of Indian art', but he had also to admit that his people were puzzled, 'for they do not know what judgment to pronounce upon my pictures'. It is possible that even if he had continued to practise his earlier methods, his people would still have been puzzled; but at least one task—the task of critical assessment—would have been much easier. Tagore would then have presented a single artistic phenomenon and the impact on his generation would have been simple and clear-cut.

If we limit Tagore's contribution to the small group of paintings in which by some hidden power he achieved artistic brilliance, the importance of his work can be seen to lie in three directions. In the first place, his art is incontestably modern. Whatever we may say of some of its features, it could not have been produced either in India or in Europe at any other time than the present. In intimate essentials it presupposes the modern theory of the unconscious, the revolutionary ideas of Freud and that re-evaluation of reason which has followed the discoveries of psychoanalysis. Similarly, its sexual content, its vindication of ugliness and its strong emotional attitudes are obvious products of the modern age. Other kinds of art may include these elements in varying degrees, but only modern art has explored them with a full awareness of their functions. At the same time, his style and manner are definitely his own. It is impossible to take one of his more important pictures and attribute it to Klee, Picasso or indeed to any other artist. A certain general influence is obvious. The use of bold distortions, freedom from shading and perspective, the employment of irrational forms—these admittedly derive from the great pioneers of modern Western art. But the total style, the ways of combining lines and colours, the detailed idioms—these are Tagore's and his alone. Within the framework of modern art, painters such as Miro, Léger (Fig. 53), Chirico and Ernst have developed private styles parallel to those of Klee and Picasso, but vitally their own; and in the same way Tagore's painting is modern and individual, intimately expressive of no one but himself.

These qualities might easily obscure a national bias. But a second reason for regarding Tagore's work as important is the fact that in some obscure yet definite manner it is also undeniably Indian. Looked at in terms of previous Indian painting, it has no direct affiliations. Yet Indian the art remains, and although a precise explanation would be difficult to give, there are two ways in which Indian qualities are apparent. The first concerns the use of lines and shapes. In some of the most vital kinds of Indian painting—those of Central India (Fig. 18) and Rajasthan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and rural Bengal (Fig. 40) in the nineteenth—the salient characteristics are bold sharp outlines, harsh and brutal distortions and vigorous rhythm. And although Tagore's idioms are quite different from those employed in these particular styles, their general character is the same. There is no imitation of earlier Indian painting. There is rather an instinctive recourse to vital modes of Indian expression. The second point concerns their subjects. In all his most significant work, there is a decided contrast between the manifest content and the latent. The latent content, as we have seen, is almost always sexual—the shapes usually possessing visual affinities with the phallus or vagina. The manifest content, on the other hand, seems to fall into three distinct groups—a group of savage humans and vicious monsters, a group of sad monumental women, and finally a group, more miscellaneous in character, in which the final images resemble turrets, rocks, snakes and birds. Such an intimate blending of sexual and non-sexual would, at first sight, seem completely un-Indian—a sophisticated expression of Western fantasy. But we must remember that one of the most important contributions made by India to human culture has been the discreet imbuing of religious and romantic situations with sexual feeling. As a result, far from being aberrations of the Western mind, each of these three groups is strongly Indian in character and possesses exact parallels in previous forms of Indian art. The savage humans and vicious animals of group one appear in sculpture from Barhut and Mathura. In this sculpture certain vegetation and water-godlings (*yakshis*) are portrayed as bland mature women, redolent of sexual charm yet intimately associated with crocodiles and dwarfs on whom they stand.[1] The *makara* or crocodile has obvious analogies with the creatures in Tagore's pictures—'Life began its dubious chapter with an exaggeration of flesh'[1] and 'Life chained to an imperfect mind send its agonised cry' (Fig. 13)—while the humped and crouching dwarf is comparable to the sullen lumbering animal of whom Tagore wrote, 'Thou lightly carriest thy triumph, wingéd grace, over the unmeaningness of arrogant bulk' (Fig. 21). In the sculpture, the dwarf and crocodile are shown as mounts for the women, and their purpose is to hint at the fertilizing qualities of earth and water. The second group, consisting of veiled or hooded faces, is even closer to traditional Indian forms. In village India a post is often set up in a mango orchard to act as 'husband' to the grove, while a newly excavated tank has a post inserted in its centre, thereby fertilizing the site and ensuring a plentiful supply of water. In a similar way, a single phallic shaft symbolizes Siva—a Saivite shrine having as image a stone post or lingam cleaving another stone, which represents the *yoni* or vagina. In most, this stone phallus is smooth and plain, but in certain temples, such as those at Bhumara (Fig. 17), Kuthara and Udayagiri, the lingam has one and sometimes several heads bursting from its stem. The multi-headed form need not concern us, but in the lingam with one head—the *ekamukha lingam*—we have an exact parallel to Tagore's hooded woman—the total form rising like a phallic post, the face emerging from it like the head of Siva (Fig. 16). Between these two conceptions there are clearly great differences. What is significant, however, is the employment of this very definite sexual shape, and the presence in each of so haunting a majesty. The third group of pictures has rather less obvious analogies, but here also a valid comparison can be made. In eighteenth-century paintings from the Punjab Hills ladies in love are constantly depicted. Their emotions are not directly stated, and it is by means of ordinary objects that the nature of their thoughts is revealed. Pitchers, lamps, birds, trees, turrets, flowers and snakes are introduced as if they were merely incidental.[2] Their true function, however, is to hint at passionate longings. The object itself is non-sexual, but since its shape is reminiscent of the male or female organ, it serves a symbolic function. Such symbolism is highly characteristic of this kind of Indian painting and, in producing similar imagery, capable of the same poetic ambiguity, Tagore was unwittingly charging his work with Indian character.

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[1] *The Art of India and Pakistan* (ed. L. Ashton, London, 1950), pls. 5 and 7.

Such affinities with traditional Indian art must not be overstressed, for one of Tagore's strongest convictions was that only by being resolutely nonconformist could a poet or artist extend and vitalize tradition.

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[1] *Chitralipi*, I, pl. 17.

[2] Compare W. G. Archer, *Kangra Painting* (London, 1952).

> 'When we speak of Indian art [he was later to declare] it indicates some truth based upon the Indian tradition and temperament. At the same time we must know that there is no such thing as absolute caste restriction in human cultures; they ever have the power to combine and produce new variations, and such combinations have been going on for ages, proving the truth of the deep unity of human psychology. . . . Fortunately for our civilisations, all such intermingling happened when professional art critics were not rampant and artists were not constantly nudged by the elbow of classifiers in their choice of inspiration. Our artists were never tiresomely reminded of the obvious fact that they were Indian; and in consequence they had the freedom to be naturally Indian in spite of all the borrowings that they indulged in.' (*Vishva-Bharati Quarterly*, May 1935.)

In Tagore's case, borrowings are not in question. Despite these arresting analogies, his work was so intimately the product of unconscious forces that any deliberate use of traditional material is unthinkable. What is more probable is that, steeped as he was in the Indian mode of life, acutely aware of traditional art and poetry yet undisturbed by academic training, he was free—to use his own phrase—'to be naturally Indian'. Insensibly, Indian attitudes to art, religion and poetry—attitudes of which the Saivite lingam, sculptures of *yakshis* and paintings from the Punjab Hills were all, in different ways, the intimate expression—must have moulded his outlook, making it in the process inescapably Indian. If, then, in his pictures certain shapes, techniques and methods seem to parallel much earlier elements in Indian art, that is because the Indian character of his personality led him to create analogous forms. The similarities are surface indications only—valuable for confounding critics who would deny his work all national character. Beyond them is the mind of Tagore himself, sensitively Indian and with the will and power to be naturally himself.

The third way in which Tagore's painting is important follows, to some extent, from this last statement. To be both modern and Indian, to be resolutely himself, one quality was necessary, and this is suggested in a sentence by Sir Herbert Read. 'The contemporary artist is one whose sense of actuality compels him to search for appropriate and necessarily original symbolic forms.'

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When his contemporaries surveyed Tagore's achievement, it was his vital originality which struck them as his most valuable gift. Viewed against the tepid sentimentalities of neo-Bengal artists, set beside febrile imitations of the Mughal and Ajanta schools, Tagore's paintings had a 'freshness and vigour' which was truly 'regenerative'.

'We need to be re-educated [wrote Nandalal Bose] into the fundamental values of art and none can do it better than he who is creating before our very eyes forms whose vigour baffles our classifications and whose vigour compels the admiration of the artist. If Rabindranath seems rough and destructive, it is because he is breaking the ground anew for us that our future flowers may be more surely assured of their sap.' (*The Paintings of Rabindranath Tagore.*)

In the light of what had gone before, Tagore's paintings had for Indian art the same kind of revolutionary and vitalizing function as Henry Moore's sculpture has had for English. Both were subtly expressive of their times. Both seem, at first sight, to involve a complete break with every immediate predecessor. Both suggest a new start, yet both can still be fitted into their respective national traditions. In 1928 a modern Indian artist was faced with an intolerable situation. He was required to produce 'strong national images', to create 'the kind of art which India had the right to expect'. The only way to achieve this was to believe in his own personal responses and to be undeterred by adverse opinion. Inner assurance was the one quality needed; and because Rabindranath Tagore possessed it above all else, he was able to break the impasse which confronted modern Indian painting.

V

Art and the Village

AMRITA SHER-GIL

'ART never exists in a vacuum but is inextricably entangled in the life of society as a whole.'[1] Before discussing the developments in painting which occurred between 1930 and 1937, we must return to the state of Indian society and examine the issue which was still predominant in Indian minds—the problem of Indian nationalism. Between 1910 and 1930 this question had undergone a subtle change of emphasis. Prior to 1920 the demand for freedom had been a monopoly of the educated, the concern of intellectuals. It was rendered vocal by lawyers, teachers, journalists—all those whose command of English enabled them to grasp the problems of a modern state. It was their agitation which led to constitutional reforms, but the very fact that they were few in numbers and were confined to towns hindered future progress. To carry India to freedom a broader basis was needed, and so, in 1920, a vital change occurred. From being on the margin, the peasant was brought into the centre. The village was exalted; the town sank away. Such a development was not in fact revolutionary, for village conditions had agitated the Congress from its very inception. Hume himself had written, 'Toil, toil, toil; hunger, hunger, hunger; sickness, suffering, sorrow; these, alas! are the keynotes of their short and sad existences.' His plea, however, had met with little response, and it was not until 1920 that awareness of the village began to dominate policy. 'The living skeletons of Orissa who go about with lack-lustre eyes and despair written on their face and a gnawing hunger in their stomach from year's end to year's end'—these moved Gandhi

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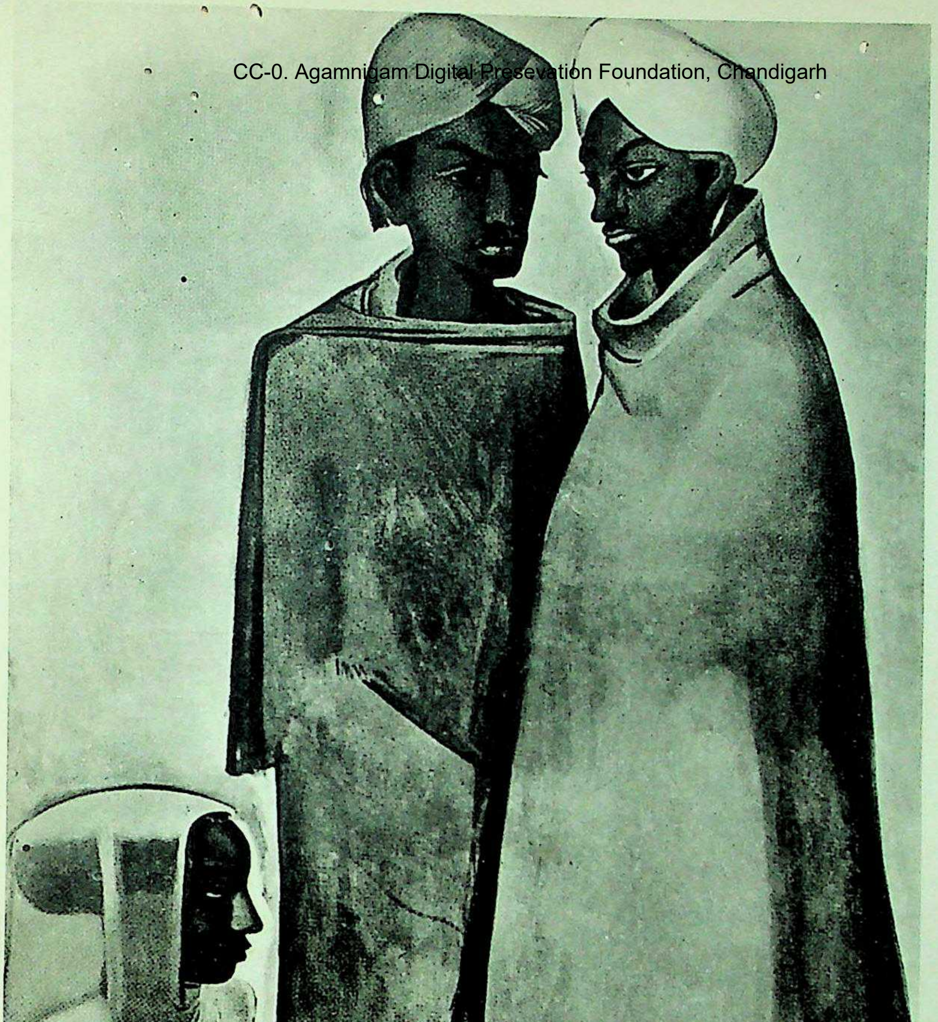
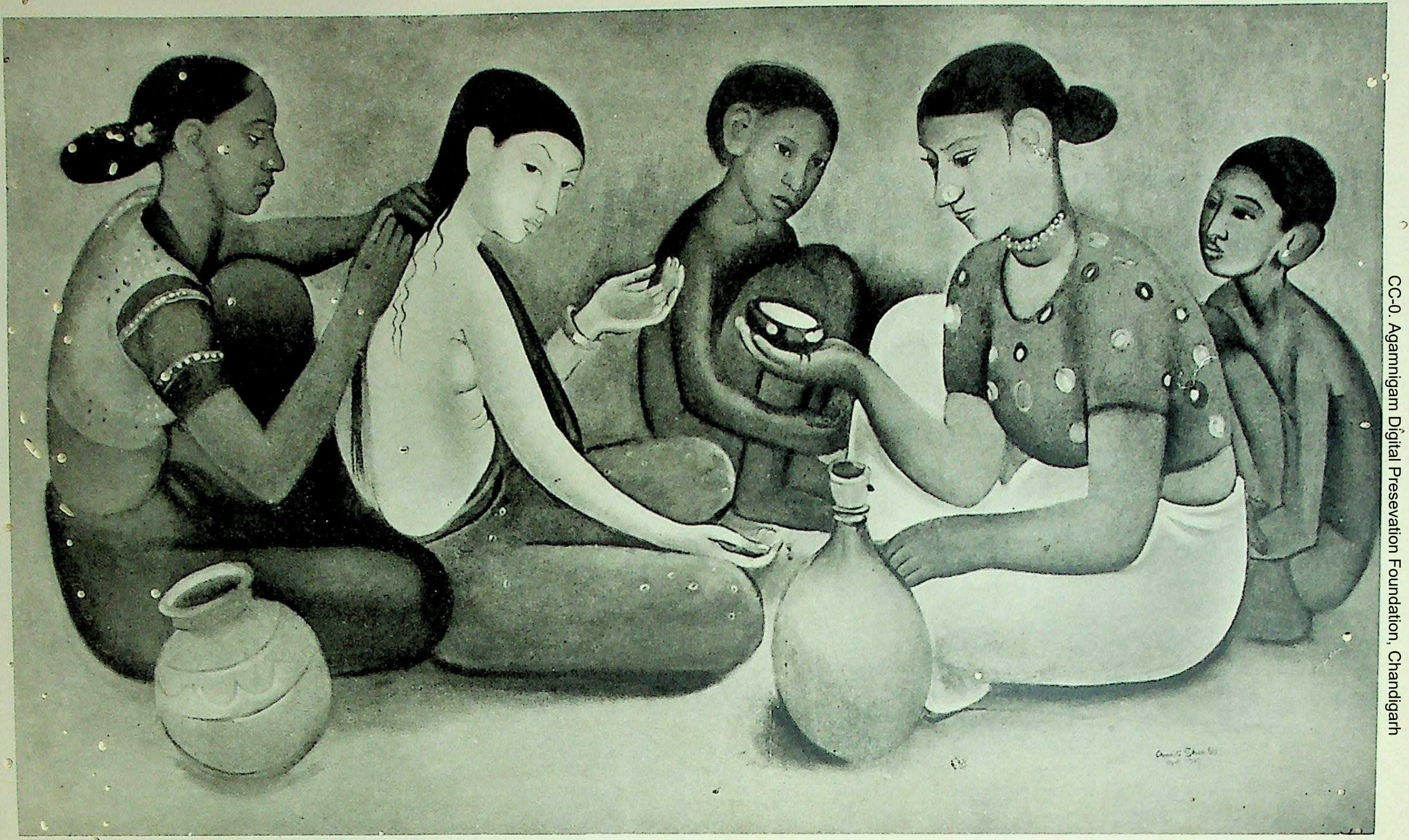
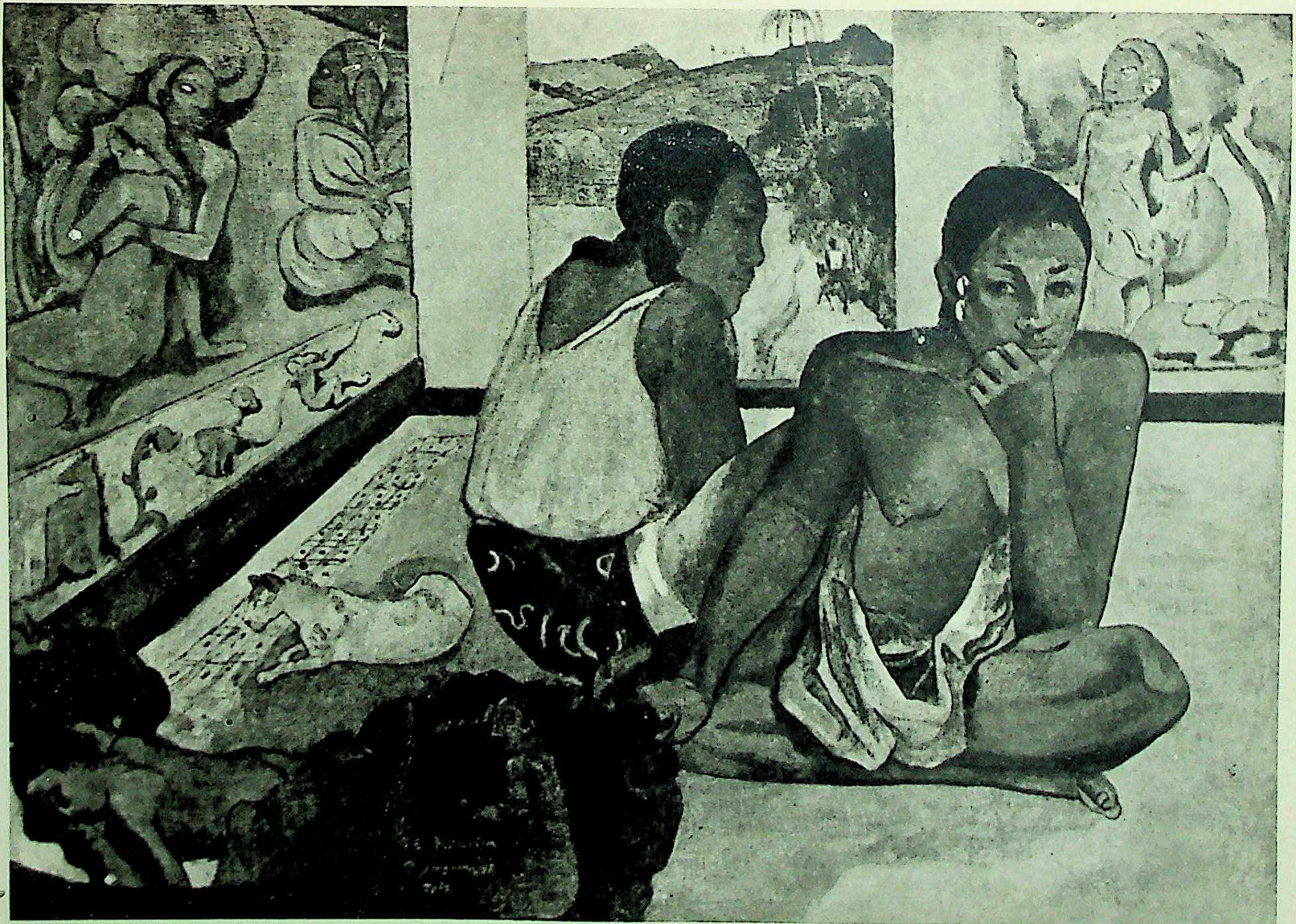
[1] Sir Herbert Read.



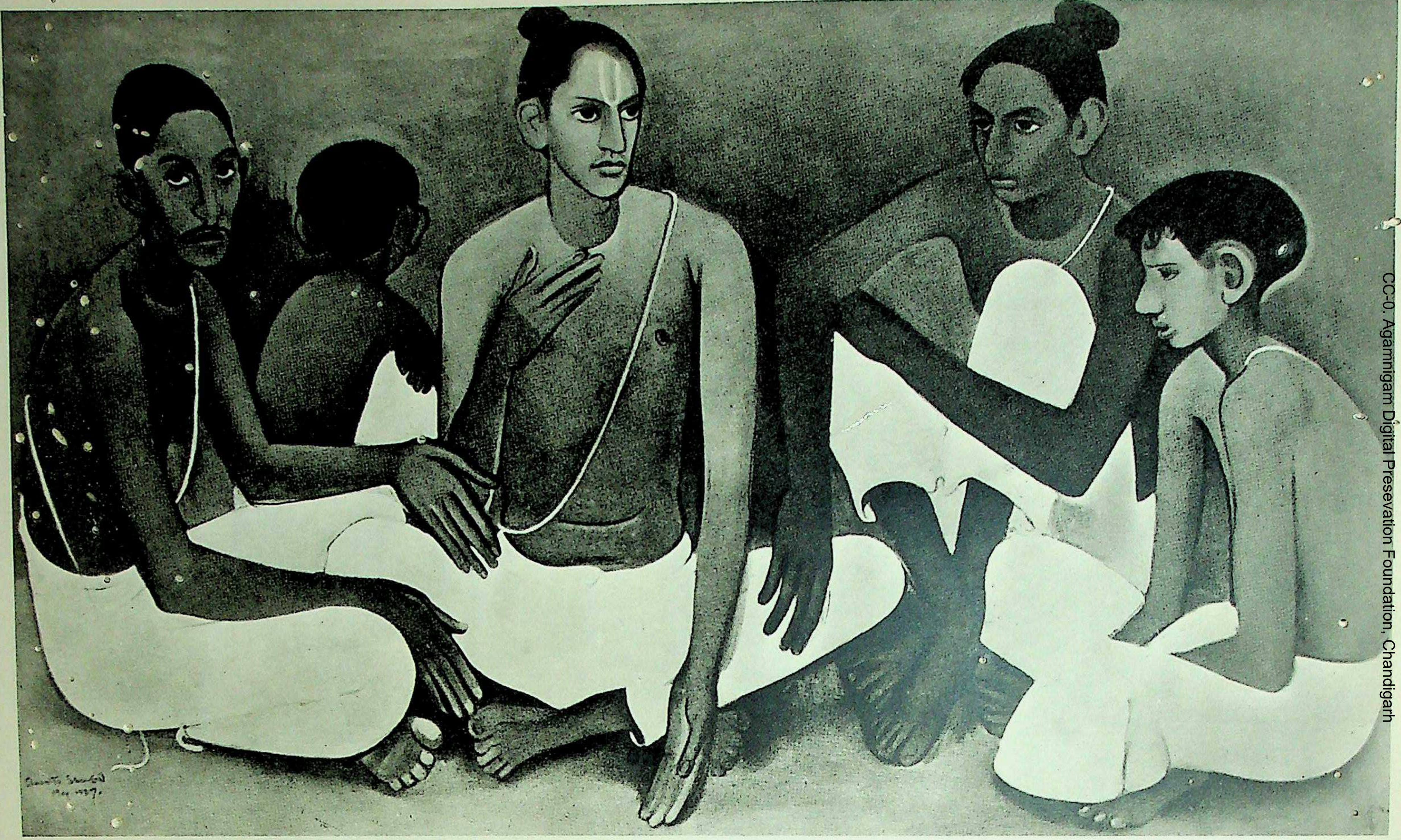
23. AMRITA SHER-GIL. Hill Men, 1935



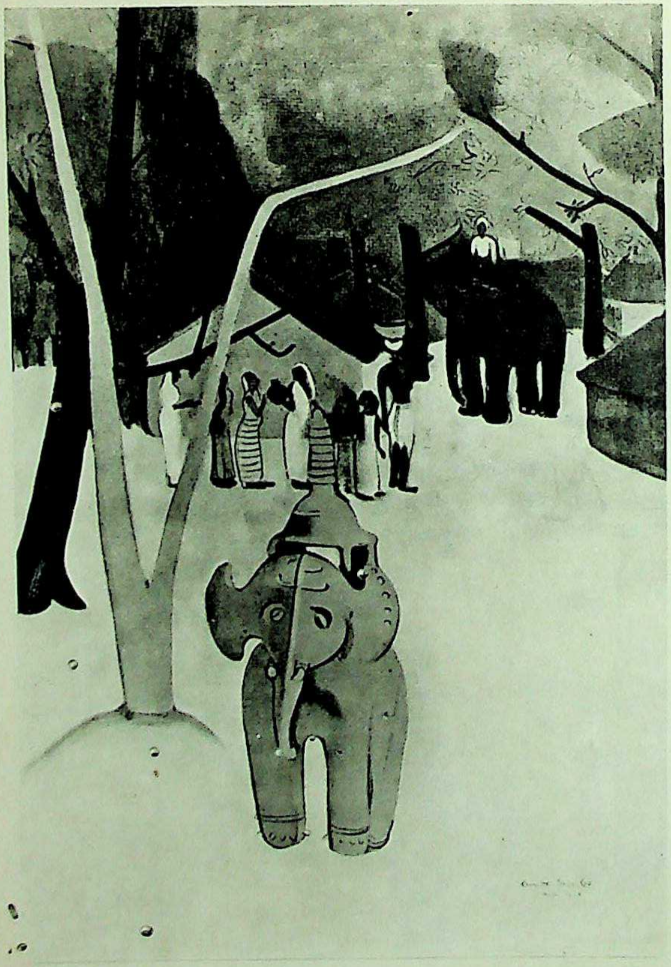
24. AMRITA SHER-GIL. Bride's Toilet, 1937



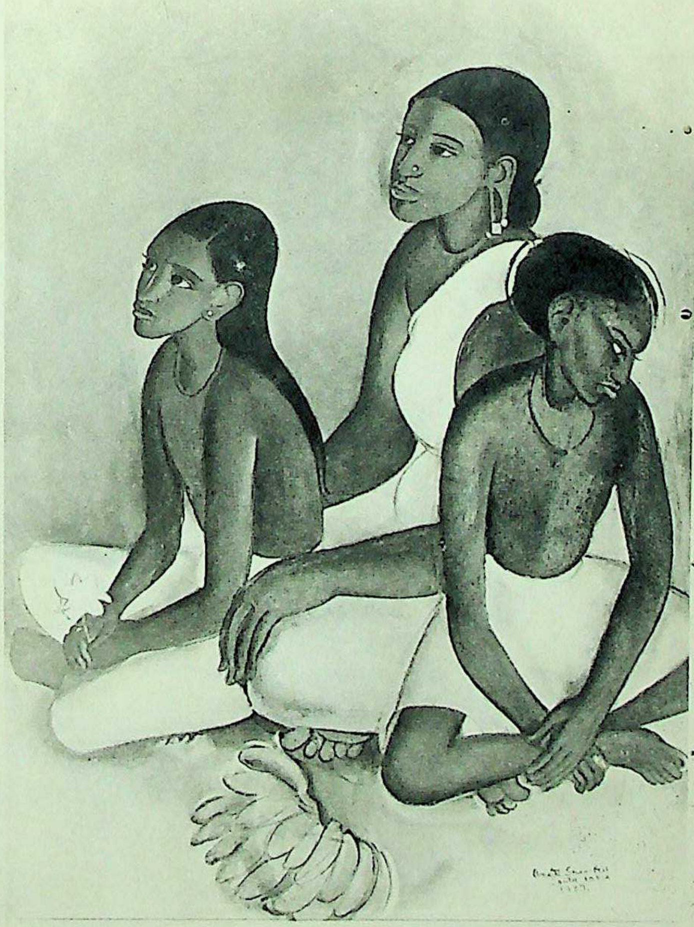
25. GAUGUIN. Two Tahitian Women, 1897. Courtauld Institute of Art, London



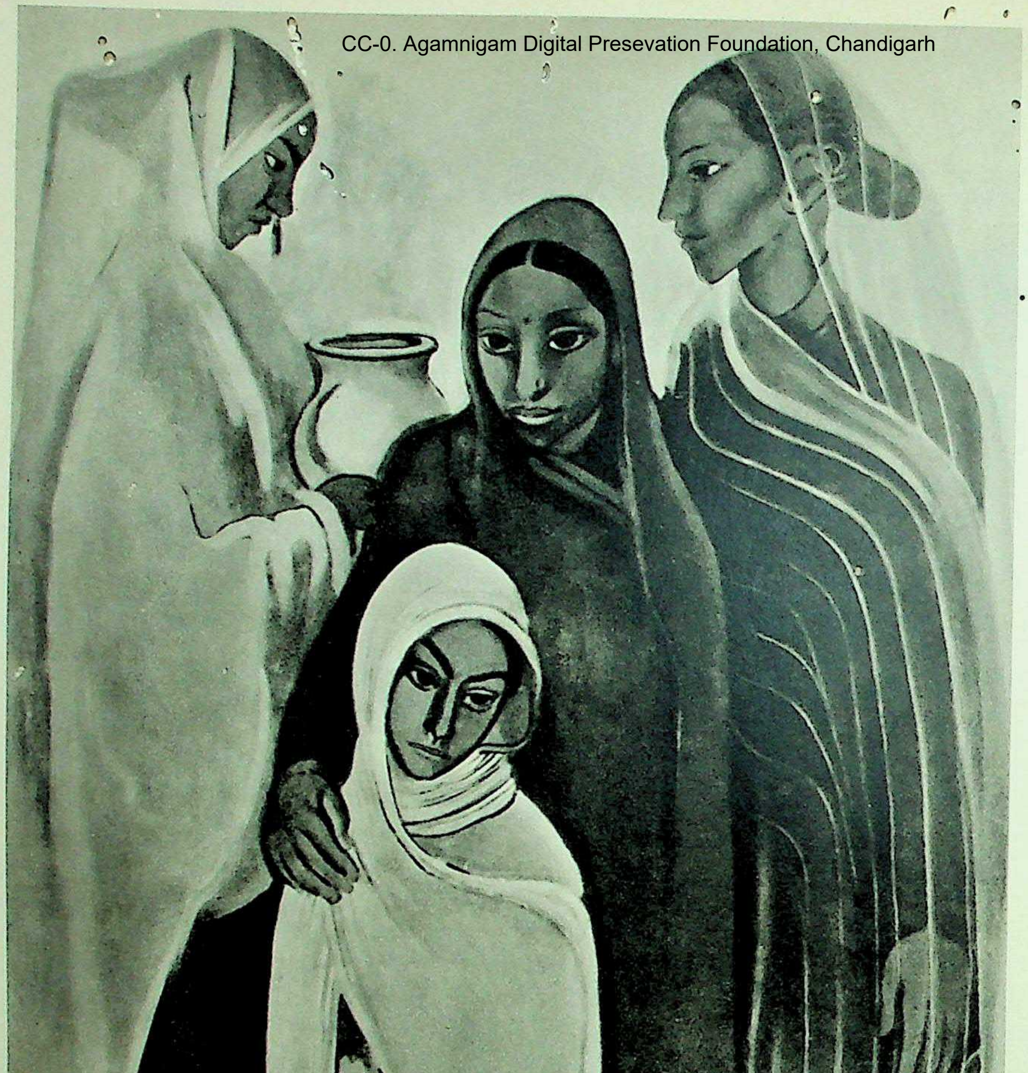
26. AMRITÀ SHER-GIL. The Brahmacharis, 1937



27. AMRITA SHER-GIL. The Little Elephant, 1938



28. AMRITA SHER-GIL. Fruit Vendors, 1937



29. AMRITA SHER-GIL. Hill Women, 1935

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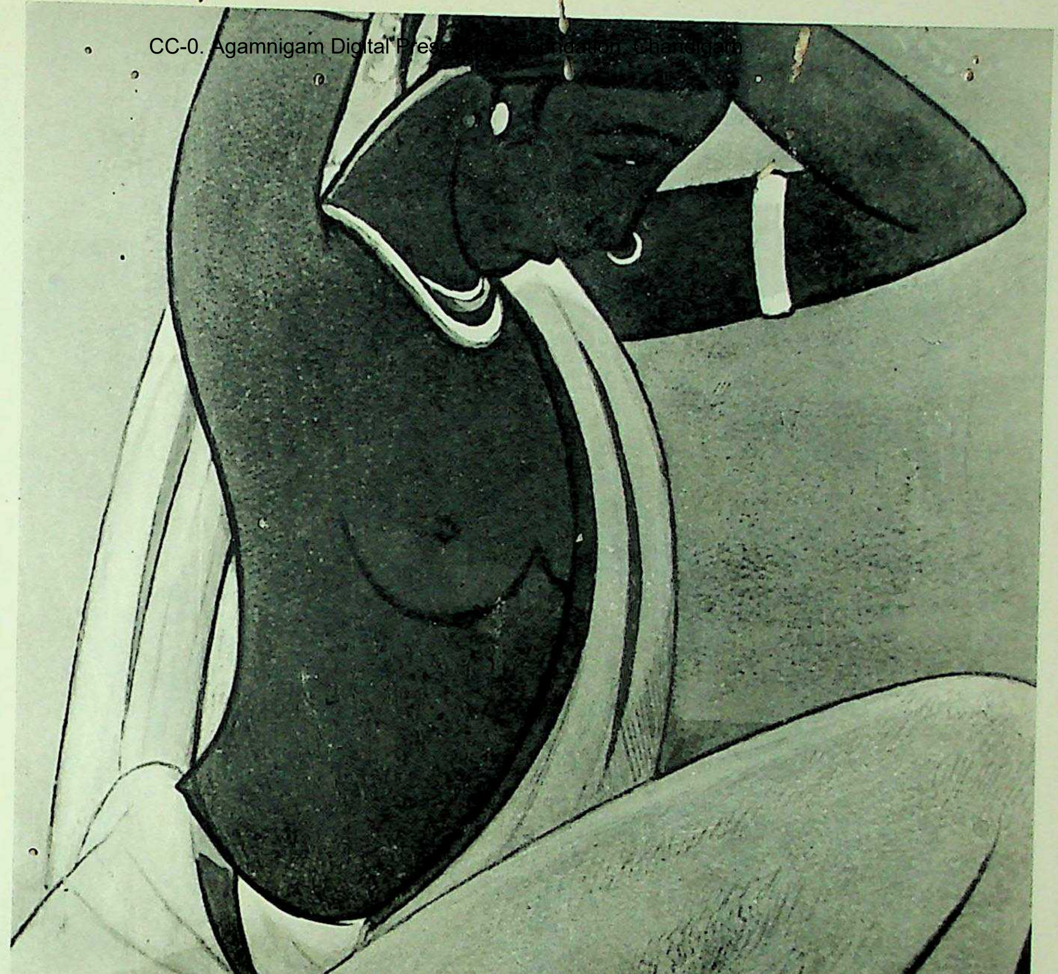
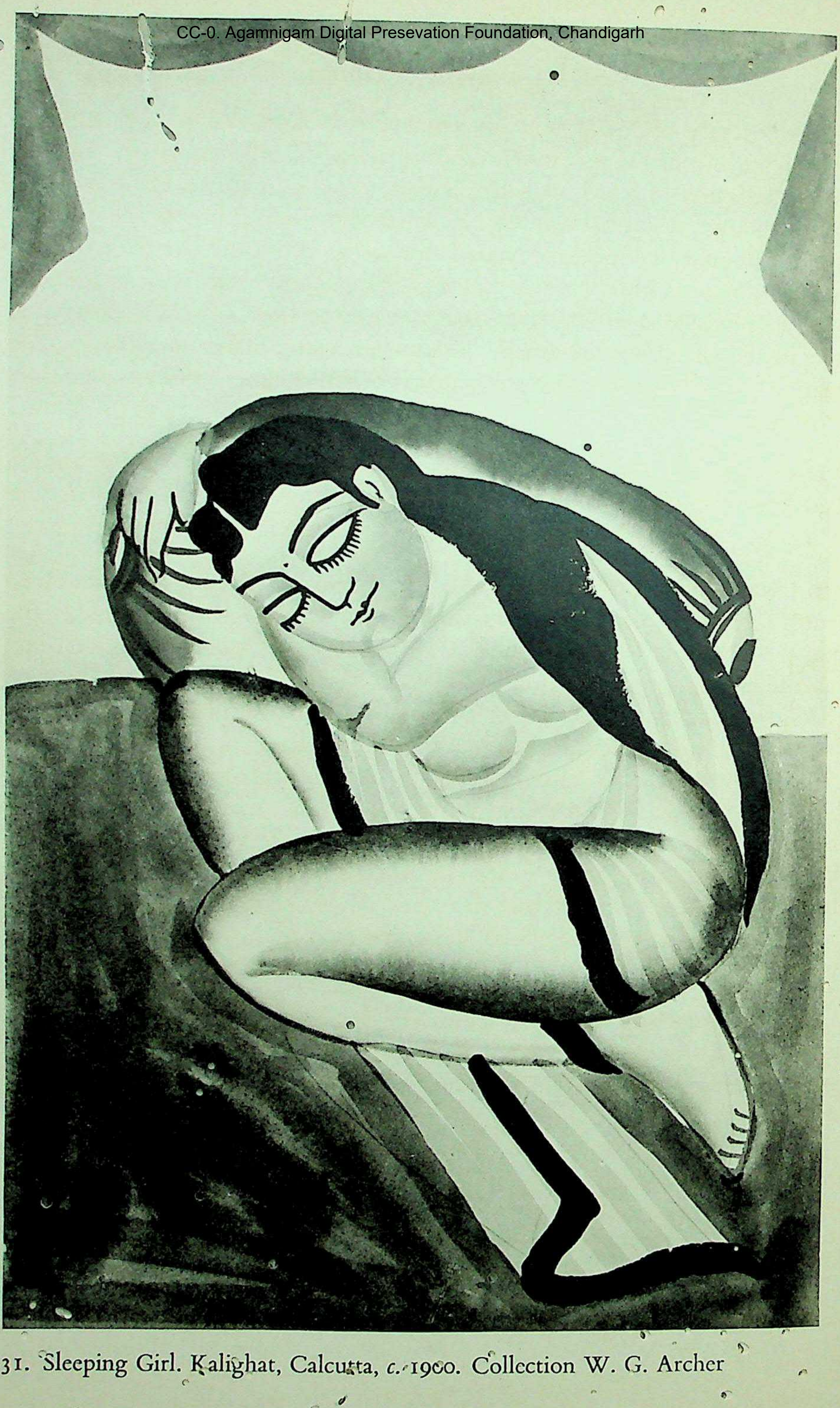


30. JAMINI ROY. Santal Girl, *c.* 1925. Municipal Museum, Allahabad



31. Sleeping Girl. Kalighat, Calcutta, *c.* 1900. Collection W. G. Archer

State Museum, LUCKNOW.

to a limitless pity and it was at his instance that Congress policy began to touch village life at all its points. The villagers, Gandhi declared, must be taught 'the dignity of freedom, self-reliance, and self-help in everything'. 'To serve our villages is to establish Swaraj. Everything else is but an idle dream.' As a result, Congress workers invaded the countryside and 'for the first time a new and different India rose up before young intellectuals who had almost forgotten its existence or attached little importance to it'. 'It was a disturbing sight,' Jawaharlal Nehru admitted, 'not only because of its stark misery and the magnitude of its problems but because it began to upset some of our values and conclusions.'

Yet desperate as the peasant's plight appeared to be, the peasant himself evoked keen admiration and we can gauge the strength of current reactions from a note recorded by a casual visitor at this time, Somerset Maugham.

'When I was leaving India people asked me which of all the sights I had seen had most impressed me. But it wasn't the Taj Mahal, the ghats at Benares, the temple at Madura or the mountains of Travancore that had most moved me; it was the peasant, terribly emaciated, with nothing to cover his nakedness but a rag round his middle the colour of the sun-baked earth he tilled, the peasant shivering in the cold of dawn, sweating in the heat of noon, working still as the sun set red over the parched fields, the starveling peasant toiling without cease in the north, in the south, in the east, in the west, toiling all over the vastness of India, toiling as he had toiled from father to son back, back for three thousand years when the Aryans had first descended upon the country, toiling for a scant subsistence, his only hope to keep body and soul together. That was the sight which had given me the most poignant emotion in India.'

It is this image which came to haunt the intelligent and sensitive. India's patience, India's endurance under misfortune, India's will to live were all suggested by the peasant's sufferings. India 'before the British' was represented in his immemorial way of life. Far more than any city-dweller, in fact, it was the peasant who now embodied modern India, and out of this conception arose the next phase in Indian painting, the art of Amrita Sher-Gil.

Amrita Sher-Gil was born in 1913, the daughter of a Sikh father and Hungarian mother. Her first eight years were passed in Europe, and not until

1921 was she able to visit her father's country. Her childhood, in fact, was quite un-Indian, and this, it would be thought, might well have disqualified her from developing any Indian form of expression. Yet despite this disadvantage, her mixed ancestry was to have important consequences. However strong may have been her mother's character, her father's influence was uppermost, and from the period of her adolescence on into womanhood, Amrita Sher-Gil never regarded herself as anything but Indian. Her father came from a leading Sikh family. His home was India. It was there that she grew up and despite certain visits to Europe it was India which aroused her most intense devotion. Yet for art her mother's Western contacts were of crucial significance. It was her mother who first recognized her talent for drawing, insisted on educating her at home and caused her to spend a few abortive months in 1924 at Florence studying under an Italian art mistress. And it was her mother, who, five years later, embarked on the novel and daring step of taking her to Paris and entering her at an art school. It is arguable that without this intervention Amrita Sher-Gil might still have developed her flair for painting, might still have acquired a skilled technique and might still have made a vital contribution. One thing, however, is certain. She would not have gone to Europe and would not have received a Parisian art-school training. She would have forfeited a Western background, and this, in the light of subsequent events, might well have proved a fatal handicap. As it was, by studying in Paris for five years, Amrita Sher-Gil was able to do what no other Indian artist had done before her—acquire a thorough education in modern art. Instead of encountering modern art through books and reproductions, she was able to explore it in the milieu which had actually created it. She could master it from the inside, and such an education was to prove the foundations of her art.

To understand the exact style which Amrita Sher-Gil was presently to evolve, we must trace, in some detail, the various stages of her development. On reaching Paris in 1929, she joined the École des Beaux Arts, and for the next five years was engaged in learning oil-painting. Oil-painting, as we have seen, had been practised in India in the eighteen-eighties by Ravi Varma (Fig. 2), but although maintained at certain art schools, it had gone out of fashion except for academic portraiture. In adopting this thoroughly Western method, therefore, Amrita was setting her face firmly to the West. Yet her innate skill was so great that despite its un-Indian character she quickly showed exceptional understanding. For three years, 1929 to 1931, she won the first prizes at the annual portrait and still-life competitions at the school; in 1932 she exhibited at the Grand Salon, and a year later was elected an Associate. Such an achievement proves that almost from the very first she was able to paint with accuracy and precision. She could represent what she saw, and however much she might later depart from natural appearances, the ability to copy Nature was hers. Looking back at the stage which she had reached in 1933, she described her pictures as 'purely Western, in fact, almost academic'. That, however, is an excuse rather than a condemnation. She was, in fact, a young artist who had avoided short cuts, had submitted to all the rigours of a strictly academic discipline, and in the process had mastered an arduous technique. The question was whether she would halt at this particular point, becoming in the process an academic portraitist—a European—or in response to the inventions of the modern movement would develop an original style, a manner that would be both Indian and modern.

The answer to this question is provided by the years 1933 and 1934. Side by side with attending classes at the École des Beaux Arts, Amrita Sher-Gil had avidly explored galleries, museums and exhibitions. She had there encountered not only the masterpieces of Italian, French and German painting from the fourteenth century onwards, but also the French masters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Between the earlier painting and the later, Amrita Sher-Gil did not discern any revolutionary difference. The best examples of modern art, she thought, conformed to the same basic principles as did works of an earlier time, and in a passage written after her return to India she defined these principles with lively vigour.

'Good art always tends towards simplification, that is to say, it only considers the essentials of a form, the stress is invariably laid on the *textural* and *structural* beauty of the work instead of the beauty of the *subject* depicted. It is characterised by vitality of execution, pungency and never has the slighest trace either of prettiness or sugariness. It is invariably stylised. Form is never imitated, it is always interpreted. Bad art, on the other hand, has always been characterised by softness of execution and conception, floridity, effeminacy of treatment and stress on unessential detail. Form is either photographically imitated or stylised in the wrong sense, i.e. idealised in the sense of feeble prettiness. It is diametrically opposed to the vital and significant stylisation of form that characterises the sculpture and painting of Ellora, Ajanta, Egyptian, Chinese, Japanese, Early Christian, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art. (*Art and Appreciation.*)

Such standards when applied to contemporary Indian painting could admit of only one conclusion. As early as 1930, when she saw Rabindranath's Paris exhibition, she had fully accepted his novel distortions of line and colour—'I like his drawings better than his poetry even,' she exclaimed. The neo-Bengal school, on the other hand, filled her with aggressive scorn.

'This school has popularly come to be known as the Renaissance of Indian painting—more on grounds of priority than of merit—for in spite of its illustrious antecedents in Ajanta and the equally admirable later schools of Indian miniature painting which the Bengal movement strives to emulate, it cannot claim to have captured the spirit of the India of bygone ages. In fact, it has about as much in common with it as the Omar Khayyam illustrations of Edmund Dulac. The work of the Bengal school is, in fact, entirely illustrative in quality and depends for its popularity not on pictorial merit but on romantic appeal.'

'The Bengal revival claims to have brought about a renaissance in Indian painting. It is to be feared that far from fulfilling its vast ambitions, this school is actually responsible for the stagnation that characterises Indian painting today. It is greatly to be deplored that while there is in existence such a significant and potent school of painting and sculpture in the West, India should remain ignorant or, worse still, foolishly derisive of it. I am speaking of the modern school. It is a significant fact that modern painting and sculpture have innumerable points of contact with the Eastern art of the good periods. Great art everywhere has the same roots and the comprehension of one brings in its wake the true appreciation of the other. Were our artists to seek inspiration from modern Western art, just as the moderns discovered a new means of self-expression through the study of Eastern sculpture and painting, not only would they infuse new life into Indian painting, but it would help them really to understand the underlying principles of the ancient art of their own country. I like to hope that the day is not far off when, impelled from an urge from within, stagnation will come to an end and in place of the synthetically and artificially planned revival, a new and more vital movement will come into being.' (*Indian Art Today.*)

This passage, written some years after her return to India, exactly expresses the position to which her experiences had brought her in 1934. But it is a diagnosis rather than a cure, the revelation of a private ambition rather than a clue to practice. For the solution which she herself was now to advance, we must turn to a different source altogether—the impact on her mind of two important artists, Cézanne and Gauguin. It is these, more than any others, who now determined her style and out of her responses to their pictures came a manner which was firmly and decisively her own.

Such a turn in her career is hardly to be wondered at, for, in most cases, without a willing surrender to an established master, without the unconscious adoption of a great style, a private manner can hardly be achieved. In imbibing first Cézanne and then Gauguin, therefore, Amrita Sher-Gil was resorting to the most practical means of creating her own form of expression. Yet a problem remains—for out of all the artists assailing her in Paris in 1933, why should she have chosen these particular two? They were clearly not the latest, the most evidently modern. They were precursors of the moderns rather than moderns themselves. She had chosen in terms of movements, not Cubism or Surrealism but Post-Impressionism; in terms of artists, not Picasso and Matisse but Cézanne and Gauguin; in terms of centuries, not the twentieth but the nineteenth. She had shrunk, in fact, from the more violent and experimental and taken refuge in the safe and the dead.

The choice of Cézanne will perhaps be clear when we consider for a moment the precise character of his achievement. Born in 1839, Cézanne had begun as a realistic painter but with leanings towards Courbet and Manet. By the middle sixties, however, he was 'observing the formal effects of colour-shapes', and in his picture, *L'Oncle Dominique*, he had deliberately treated 'the moustache and beard as a dark brown circle enclosing a pink one and balanced in a particular way with the shapes of creamy white and brick red made by the collar and tie'. Already, in fact, he was showing himself 'less concerned to paint a realist portrait than to handle oil paint in a particular way and to record his personal experience of related forms and colours'. As a result, two distinct qualities were apparent—'a warm deep sympathy with the spirit of the sitter as a human being and an aesthetic concern with colour and form as such'. By the eighties this concern for form and colour had gone much further, and in a picture such as *La Route Tournante*[1] the underlying structure of the landscape rather than its surface appearance determined the picture's character. 'Cézanne's perception of the scene warmed by his sensation of perceiving it was a grasp of the formal relations of the individual forms and colours', and the ensuing picture is 'an architectural statement, a record of Cézanne's feeling that the scene is affective because the tree forms and house forms are dovetailed together in a three-dimensional formal pattern poised on the curve created by the road'. This attitude determined the whole of Cézanne's painting. Architecture was his prime concern—'the cylinder, the cone and the cube' his ultimate objectives. And as a result his whole art was a striving for simplification. He would first complete the main structure in its broad essentials and then gradually add supplementary details. In this way, even a portrait approximated to a building.

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[1] R. H. Wilenski, *Modern French Painters* (London, 1940) pl. 15A.

> 'Content with the quietest attitudes and the simplest accessories, Cézanne built up a formal structure touch by touch, working first from one centre and then from another, each group of touches being governed both by their mutual relations and by their combined relation to the structure as a whole.'[1]

The resulting picture was, in no sense, the kind of pattern or composition contemplated by an art school. It was rather a study of the sitter in terms of the artist's whole attitude or temperament. The general convention was one of naturalism, but simplification imparted to it a kind of gaunt grandeur. Life was purged of pettiness, and it is perhaps this moral quality quite as much as its aesthetic virtues which impressed the young Amrita Sher-Gil. 'Naturalism simplified' became her goal, and by 1933 she was moulding her forms in a Cézannesque manner—conveying a strong sense of volume but expressing, above all, a monumental dignity.

The second artist to influence her—Paul Gauguin—confronts us with a much more difficult problem. Until the autumn of 1933 her style was, in every way, much closer to Cézanne's than to Gauguin's. During the winter of 1933 to 1934, however, fascination with Gauguin's work became so strong that it seems almost to have haunted her. 'She used to say', E. Narayanan has recorded, 'that Cézanne inspired her beyond all others but that she liked Paul Gauguin best of all.' This passionate adhesion was to prove decisive—it was actually to precipitate her own adult style—yet when we examine its influence upon her, we are driven to a surprising conclusion. There are certain qualities in Gauguin which make him the most 'Indian' of Western artists. Equally, there is another quality which is quite un-Indian—a quality which arises from his personal predicaments and expresses his private view of life. The first of these qualities might easily have affected a young Indian and led to fertile results. Yet it was not these qualities but the second which seems to have stirred Amrita Sher-Gil, occasioning the 'liking' which was to play such a supreme role. We can only explain this strange reaction by recalling her state of mind at the end of her period in Paris. But first we must analyse more closely the strands in Gauguin which were to lead to this somewhat paradoxical outcome.

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[1] R. H. Wilenski, *Modern French Painters*, II, 77.

Until 1891 Gauguin had been a French artist aware of certain revolutionary trends but committed to a life of painting in his native France. In 1887, however, he had gone to Martinique. He had stayed there for a little under a year, but the new environment had fired him with a love of tropical exuberance. In 1891 he decided to abandon France and settle in the South Seas. In 1893 he returned to Europe, but only for two years, and from 1895 until his death in 1903 he lived continuously in the South Seas, spending most of his time in Tahiti but moving in 1901 to the Marquesas. During this time he painted tropical landscapes, tropical situations, tropical women, and it is in these pictures as well as in his diaries and letters that the two strands in his nature become evident.

The Indian qualities in Gauguin can best be suggested by some extracts from his writings. When he analysed his sensations before the landscapes of Tahiti, he distinguished

> 'a delight distilled from some indescribable sacred horror which I glimpse of far-off things. The odour of an antique joy which I am breathing in the present. Animal shapes of a statuesque rigidity: indescribably antique, august and religious in the rhythm of the gesture, in their singular immobility. In the dreaming eyes is the overcast surface of an unfathomable enigma.' (*Letter to André Fontainas*, March 1899.)

It was the enigma, in fact, of 'a superabundantly rich and wild nature', fired with tropical sunshine—vegetable yet, at the same time, imbued with sensuality. 'In the thickets, in the shady streams, the women whisper,' and it was this factor—the presence of women—which seemed to animate the trees and charge them with animal mystery. The smooth succulence of their bodies suggested a plant-like character, and he says of a youth who guided him into the mountains, 'It seemed to me that I saw incarnated in him, palpitating and living, all the magnificent plant-life which surrounded us. Was it really a human being walking there ahead of me? Was it not rather the Forest itself, the living Forest, without sex and yet alluring?'

These conceptions immediately call to mind Indian analogies. There is not only the woman and tree motif in the sculpture of Sanchi and Barhut—the forms of the women seeming almost to exude a vegetable sap. There is also the whole range of Sanskrit poetry where the forest is depicted as if with an amorous life of its own, duplicating on the level of trees, plants, animals, birds and insects the passionate activities of men and women.

'Rain scents of the coupling of the trees come to the assembly of poets again. You went to bathe in the river and I took new interest in the king's stallion. He roared for the quick mares to be brought to him, he drummed with his forelegs upon them, O woman moist with a boy's love.' (Mayura.)

'A yellow cloud of hornets is about the water-flower, and it is scented as it lies in the tumult of the pool. Your navel is a water-flower and lo! there is a cloud of saffron hornets about it.' (*Ibid.*)

> In spring when the love lord's golden wand is seen in the colour of the flowers
> When bees which come to the clustering blossom make it the quiver of love
> When youthful trees look laughing at those who lose their shame
> When spear-shaped boughs are studding the quarters, piercing those who are parted from love
> When blossoming mangoes thrill to the clasp of tremulous vernal creepers
> When the forest is cleansed by the river meandering through the wood.
>
> (Jayadeva)

In verses such as these the words are Indian, but the sense of Nature as something impregnated with love and passion is nothing if not Gauguin's.

A similar closeness to early Indian views appears in Gauguin's attitude to love. 'Golden bodies in the streams charmed me by their forms,' he wrote in

Noa Noa, and of a girl who became his model, he says, 'She was tall in figure and the sun's fire blazed in the gold of her flesh while all the mysteries of love slept in the night of her hair.' He constantly praised the 'animal beauty' of the women, their 'majestic sculptural forms, ample and at the same time, gracious', their bodies 'with the grace and elasticity of healthy young animals'. Such forms seemed made for love, and he goes on to describe the easy naturalness with which they accepted the exchanges of sex.

'There is nothing to say except talk about women and sleep with them. Not ripe, almost ripe, quite ripe. There is so much prostitution that it does not exist. We call it that but they do not think of it as that. One only knows a thing by its contrary and the contrary does not exist.' (*Intimate Journals.*)

'The amorous passion of a Maori courtesan is something quite different from the passivity of a Parisian cocotte—something very different. There is a fire in her blood which calls forth love as an essential nourishment; which exhales it like a fatal perfume. These eyes and this mouth cannot lie. Whether calculating or not, it is always love that speaks from them.' (*Noa Noa.*)

And he proceeds to justify the enjoyment of their charms.

'It's a rest after the labours of art to let one's mind play and one's body too. Besides it preserves you from a boring austerity and the vile hypocrisy that makes people so evil. An orange and a side-glance, nothing more is necessary. The priest says this is all sin. The women like astonished deer seem to say with their velvety glances, "That's not true".' (*Intimate Journals.*)

Such expressions might, at first sight, seem typically French, yet once again Indian analogies are ready to hand. In the fourth-century treatise on erotics, the *Kama Sutra*, the female form is treated as a source of wilful delight, the courtesan is honoured for the refreshment which she gives, and Kalidasa himself celebrates again and again the joys of loving.

Romantic maids, like the adorable gloaming
Lit by the shimmering moon, playfully dally
With lips that hold a ready smile
And with stolen glances from lowered eyes
They soon ignite the flame of love
In the mind of the wayworn wanderer.

May you pass your summers
Where lotus and lily lift their heads in the pools
And, at night, on open balcony
When the air vibrates with song
From a voice that is rich and tender
May you nestle midst charming women
In sweet inflowing sleep.

In this poetry sin is absent, and indeed so near to Gauguin's spirit are these early Indian conceptions that sexual intercourse itself was often interpreted in Indian religion as a symbol of union with the divine.

It is when we come to painting itself, however, that Gauguin's Indian affinities are most striking. His chief subjects were women in different states of love. 'These nymphs I want to perpetuate them with their golden skins, their searching animal odours, their tropical savours.' And although Indian painters shrank from any cult of the nude, it was precisely this subject—woman in love—which engrossed their attentions. For treating such a subject, two qualifications were necessary—a delight in feminine grace and a feeling for poetry; and Gauguin exploited both to the full. 'Literary poetry in a painter', he declared, 'is something special and is neither illustration nor the translation of writing by form,' and he went on to employ the same methods current among the Indian painters of Kangra and Basohli—symbolic imagery and passionate colour. Red, for example, was continually employed as an index to passion, while natural objects were given the same ambiguous functions as in Kangra paintings themselves. In the picture, *Women with Mangoes*,[1] the fruit is introduced as a symbolic parallel for the ripeness of the women's bodies. In *Flowers, Tahiti*, the blossom is shown in a vase on which lovers are portrayed in intimate union—the flowers serving as an obvious symbol for their passionate endeavours. In *Breasts with Red Flowers* the same image is employed with exactly the same intention, while in yet another picture, *La Reine des Areois*,[2] the queen's maturity is symbolically expressed by the flowering landscape and the mangoes on a stool. Other pictures use similar images. *Le Repas* is not merely a study of three children eating, but a suggestive interpretation of their adolescent powers—the huge knife, the great bowl and the enormous plantains all hinting at their sexual needs. And just as in Basohli and Kangra pictures, a pet deer, a parrot or a donkey are introduced as symbolic substitutes for absent lovers, Gauguin continually inserted a fox or a rider as protagonists in some tropical intrigue (Fig. 25). Moved by perceptions beyond his conscious control, Gauguin achieved, in fact, the same type of painting which several centuries of experiment had perfected in India.

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[1] R. H. Wilenski, *Modern French Painters*, pl. 45A.

[2] *Ibid.*, pl. 35.

Such qualities suggest the kind of influence which Gauguin could easily have exerted. His painting might well have compelled Amrita Sher-Gil to re-evaluate much Indian art. It might have driven her to affirm a new type of romantic sensuality. It might even have occasioned the kind of painting which was later to be developed by George Keyt. Yet, in fact, it did none of these things, and while the reason is partly her own personality—there was a certain frigidity in her temperament—it was the existence in Gauguin of a second and contradictory strand which explains the influence which he actually exerted. While still in France, Gauguin had observed of his picture, *Christ in the Garden of Olives*,[1] 'it is imbued with an abstract sadness and sadness is my vocation'. And the same sadness seems to have dogged him during his residence in the South Seas. Despite his Indian attitude to sexual love, his Indian delight in feminine form, his Indian sense of poetry, a tendency to disillusion continually prevented him from ever achieving the supreme Indian experience—rapturous release through love. Tehura, his Tahitian wife, he says, was 'full of laughter and melancholy'. And other Tahitian women with all their animal attractions ultimately expressed for him only 'fear and the desire for the unknown, the melancholy of bitter experience which lies at the root of all pleasure'. Behind their apparent *naïveté*, there lay a 'shrewdness and subtlety', and it was this which soured his 'hard and loving heart'. As a result, it is not the exultations of romance which find expression in his pictures. There is rather a sense of sour distaste, of languid boredom, of dull lassitude—in place of joyous abandon, melancholy.

For Amrita Sher-Gil the existence of this mood seems to have been decisive. It obliterated Gauguin's other and more Indian qualities. It neutralized his sensual exuberance and caused her to concentrate on an aspect of his work which, at first sight, may well appear superficial. As she neared the end of her stay in Paris she was 'haunted with an intense longing to return to India'. This India, however, was a purely arbitrary creation. 'Before leaving for Europe as a very young girl', she later wrote, 'I had been so wholly an introvert that I had never really seen or observed anything round or outside me. I worked entirely from imagination in those days and living in pictures instead of reality, I conceived India through the medium of those specimens of Western art that still abound in local exhibitions'—the India of the travel posters, 'voluptuous, colourful, sunny and superficial'. (*Evolution of my Art.*) Gauguin was certainly not a travel poster artist, yet the very fact that his pictures were about the tropics, that they were filled with brown Indian-like figures and were 'sunny and voluptuous' gave them an Indian appearance. They were a substitute for India, a fulfilment of her imagination, a compensation. But equally, they were great and powerful art, expressing in their style the same drive to simplification which she admired so strongly in Cézanne. Two aspects of Amrita Sher-Gil, the artist and the Indian, were stirred, and it is hardly surprising that Gauguin's pictures came to exercise so profound a fascination. Gauguin was India, and when at last she returned, India itself became Gauguin.

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[1] R. H. Wilenski, *ibid.*, pl. 26.

This intimate adherence had three important consequences. We have seen how by 1930 the villager was already haunting Indian intellectuals—his condition making him a symbol of 'contemporary reality'. At the same time, his economic plight seemed to embrace the whole status and future of India itself. And it is this condition which struck Amrita Sher-Gil with all the force of a new revelation. As she travelled to the Punjab she saw for the first time the state of village India, and the words with which she recorded her vision show how profoundly Gauguin had affected her responses. 'It was the vision,' she wrote, 'of a winter in India—desolate yet strangely beautiful—of endless tracks of luminous yellow-grey land, of dark-bodied, sad-faced, incredibly thin men and women who move silently, looking almost like silhouettes and over which an indefinable melancholy reigns.' (*Evolution of my Art.*) In this vision it is not merely the 'indefinable melancholy' which is a distillation from Gauguin. The image of 'luminous yellow-grey land' unconsciously echoes some of his greatest paintings. Gauguin's *Yellow Christ*,[1] stretched above brooding women, has precisely this colour, while in *Nevermore*[2] it is the acid yellow of the pillow supporting the girl's hair which gives the scene its air of bitter sadness. Gauguin, in fact, had heightened her awareness, and the results are apparent not only in her mood but in her actual sensations.

The second consequence is the artistic programme which she now set herself.

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[1] Herbert Read, *Gauguin* (London, 1949) pl. 5.

[2] *Ibid.*, pl. 6.

'As soon as I put my foot on Indian soil, not only in subject, spirit, but also in technical expression, my painting underwent a great change, becoming more fundamentally Indian. I realised my real artistic mission then: to interpret the life of Indians and particularly the poor Indians pictorially; to paint those silent images of infinite submission and patience, to depict their angular brown bodies, strangely beautiful in their ugliness; to reproduce on canvas the impression their sad eyes created on me.' (*The Story of my Life*.)

And it is this programme which governed the first four years of her return. From a studio in her parents' house in Simla she painted *Hill Men* (Fig. 23) and *Hill Women* (Fig. 29)—using as models people from near-by villages, and although these two pictures are in fact some of her greatest productions, two others—*Three Girls*[1] and *Child Wife* (Fig. 1), also painted in 1935—betray the same intense interest. In 1936 she toured extensively in the south, immersing herself in village life, and out of this visit came another study, *Fruit Vendors* (Fig. 28), painted while she was still in Madras. But it was in Simla in 1937 that her South Indian impressions achieved their maximum effect. Working from sketches taken during her travels, and aided by local models, she gradually built up three great compositions—*The Bride's Toilet* (Fig. 24), *The Brahmacharis* (Fig. 26) and *South Indian Villagers going to Market*.[2] These portray Indian villagers in exactly the way she had laid down. 'I want to be an interpreter of the atrocious physiological misery that abounds in our country,' she told Barada Ukil, 'my aim an art connected with the soil.'

Such a programme was quite new in modern Indian painting. In its search for the past, the neo-Bengal school had completely avoided this theme, and it was only in 'Company' art (the pictures produced by Indian artists for British patrons) that 'poor Indians'—the urban proletariat and the humble peasant—had found any considerable place. The motive for their introduction was the British interest in 'the picturesque' and in 'manners and customs', and it was more as an unconscious by-product than the result of deliberate intention that their tragic dignity had been expressed. For modern Indian art, the subject was still undeveloped, and in consciously exploring it Amrita Sher-Gil was not only revealing her contemporary awareness but breaking new ground. Yet when we seek an explanation of this sudden selection of new subjects, we are once again brought back to Gauguin. The subjects painted by Gauguin are recognizably of the same general type as those chosen by Amrita Sher-Gil. Gauguin's models were all drawn from the villagers, and Amrita's own words, 'to interpret the life of Indians pictorially', could equally serve as a description of Gauguin's programme for Tahitians. In terms of Indian art, her paintings were revolutionary, but it was her 'liking for Gauguin' which had nerved her to break so sharply with the past.

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[1] Karl Khandalavala, *Amrita Sher-Gil* (Bombay, 1944) pl. A.

[2] *Ibid.*, pl. 6.

Two aspects, then—the mood of melancholy, the choice of subjects—can be related to Gauguin. But it is a third consequence, the projection of her own original style, which is by far the most important, and this process we must now attempt to define. When we review the history of art, it is clear that without an emotional adhesion to other artists many painters have found it difficult to arrive at their own original forms of expression. It is as if an outside influence has been necessary in order to release the full resources of the personality. The artist acquires a style in order to discard it; he learns an old manner in order to outgrow it. In the process his own originality asserts itself—it is, as it were, uncovered—and the result is the style which later gives his work a novel and authentic accent. This process is so common that many examples could be given, but perhaps the most apposite for our purpose is the relationship of the English artists, Samuel Palmer and William Blake. During the years 1825 to 1832, Palmer developed a strongly original style through which he invested English landscapes with 'visions of little dells, and nooks and corners of Paradise; models of the exquisitest pitch of intense poetry'. His work, Robert Melville has said, is 'a dream of exuberance', and there are phrases by Palmer himself which vividly evoke its chief qualities—'intense depth, solemnity and vivid brilliancy', 'mystic and dreamy glimmer'. Through all these pictures there runs a strain of sensual glamour, a delight in rounded hills, grooved valleys and bland seductive moons, and there can be little doubt that the prime impulse was a kind of delayed and adolescent ardour, a sexuality which was denied expression in ordinary life—he did not marry until 1837—and by way of compensation endowed landscapes with a feminine fatness and 'magical abundance'. Such pictures are nothing if not Palmer's. None could be mistaken for another artist's and the style is deeply and emphatically his own. Yet when we consider its immediate origins, it is clear that without the influence of William Blake neither style nor subject-matter would have been possible. It is in Blake that we find a conscious

State Museum, LUCKNOW.

demand for that 'distinct, sharp and wiry bounding line' which Palmer vindicated in his sentence, 'The outline, I believe, to be the great difficulty; the only first step and great accomplishment of art'. It is in Blake's Virgilian woodcuts that the germs of rounded hills and moon-clad fields appear. It is in Blake that free poetic distortions, primitive vigour and archaic figures are boldly exploited. And it is Blake whose adherence to Bunyan and delight in rural plenitude supplies a pointer to Palmer's 'bucolic holiness' and loaded fertile vales. All these influences are present, but more important is the impact of the older artist's system of ideas. Blake's phrase, 'Exuberance is beauty', is the clue to Palmer's 'effervescence' and 'excess'. Blake's frank acceptance of sex—he was the author of the phrase 'lovely copulation'—prepares the way for Palmer's instinctive surrender to physical urges. Above all, Blake's whole character as prophet, visionary and poet sanctioned Palmer's recourse to poetic dreaming and the steeping of landscape in ardent visionary longings. Blake is crucial. Yet Palmer is not Blake. Such traces of the latter's style as are evident in Palmer's pictures are mainly incidental. The style itself is different, and it is clear that far from Palmer copying Blake or modelling his work upon him, this artist was merely the means by which Palmer discovered his own form of poetic expression. An emotional adhesion to Blake occurred, but the stimulus which it gave to Palmer's sensibility, the opening-up of his own creative resources—these were its vital repercussions. Palmer identified himself with Blake and in the process became not Blake but Palmer.

It is precisely this process which occurred in the case of Gauguin and Amrita Sher-Gil. We have seen how in the winter of 1933 to 1934 she came under Gauguin's influence and this is analogous to Palmer becoming affected by Blake in 1824, the year before he developed his new style. Then, in 1934, Amrita Sher-Gil returned to India and at once a private and original style emerged. Her five greatest pictures were painted between 1935 and 1937, and in all five her own style is plain. Certain elements—the melancholy aloofness of the figures, the air of huddled grouping, the eyes gazing in different directions—spring from partial adoptions of Gauguin's manner. So also, it could be argued, do other idioms—the over-enlarged feet, the raised eyebrows, the method of painting hair and veils, the sharply outlined limbs and contours. Even the general palette stands in fairly close relation to certain of Gauguin's works. The pale icy blue and the greenish-grey of Gauguin's *Nevermore* and *Two Tahitian Women* provide the leading colours in *Hill Men*

(Fig. 23). The pink in *South Indian Villagers going to Market*[1] echoes the colour of the earth in *The Summons*,[2] while the colour sequence itself sometimes accords with a Gauguin pattern. In *Hill Women* (Fig. 29) the pale greenish-grey cloth of the left-hand woman adjoins the pale brown-red of a pitcher, and this in turn leads on to the blackish-green of the middle figure and finally to the bright greenish-white of a girl's dress. All these colours in the same gradation appear in the front left-hand portion of *Nevermore*. Yet important as these likenesses are, they are incidental to the main effect. Indeed, in all five pictures, it is the ways in which they differ from Gauguin's work rather than the ways in which they resemble it which matter. In *Hill Men*, for example, certain colours can be traced to some of Gauguin's pictures, but many of his colours are absent and the result is totally new. In place of warmth there is an air of chilly pallor, an indication not of luxuriant distaste but frigid pity, a sense of anguish at the bleak miseries of the hill-men. And the same effect is achieved by the vigorous simplification of physiques. The contours of the two men and crouching woman are much sharper than in any painting by Gauguin. There is a sense of chiselled hardness, of cold detachment which communicates a feeling of lonely austerity. The perfect posing of the forms gives them a dignified composure, and we are left with a sense of stony majesty, of men paralysed but uncomplaining. The same emotions are engendered in her other four works, but particularly in what is perhaps her greatest picture—*The Brahmacharis* (Fig. 26). The colours here—the whites, greys and reddish-browns—owe scarcely anything to Gauguin, and they are welded together with so muscular a tautness that the figures have an even starker majesty. In these pictures, far more is expressed than the transient reactions of a young exile. Stimulated by Gauguin, Amrita Sher-Gil had discovered her own style of painting and had used it to interpret the solemn gravity of Indian life in a stark and brutal age.

Such pictures compel us to ask a basic question. Granted that all five evince a private and original style—a style that is distinct from that of either Gauguin or Cézanne—granted also that they are modern, are they also Indian? In undergoing a Western training, had Amrita Sher-Gil forfeited her right to be considered an Indian artist? Valid and moving as her paintings are, do they solve or do they merely evade the other problem of her time—the creation of an art that was both Indian and modern? Although trained in

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[1] Karl Khandalavala, *Amrita Sher-Gil*, pl. 6.

[2] Herbert Read, *op. cit.*, pl. 10.

Western oil-painting, Amrita Sher-Gil was acutely conscious of her Indian nationality. She was avid to be Indian and, although contemptuous of neo-Bengal painters, was proudly aware of India's artistic tradition. Accordingly, in announcing her artistic mission—'to interpret the life of Indians and particularly the poor Indians pictorially'—she had no illusions about her style. She would 'interpret them with a new technique, my own technique', and this technique, 'though not technically Indian in the traditional sense of the word will yet be fundamentally Indian in spirit'. It would be a technique in which 'experiences are transmitted not on the descriptive plane but on the plane of deep emotional significance—line, colour and design'. And it is this manifesto which in fact explains her style. There is no evidence that in the period in which it was actually formed, the years 1934 to 1935, she made any close study of previous Indian painting—it was not until 1936 that she actually visited Ajanta. None the less, it is Ajanta painting which most nearly resembles her five greatest pictures. At Ajanta there is the same simplification of physique, the same reliance on clear outline and firmly moulded form. Detailed correspondences are lacking, but the underlying principles are the same. Such a similarity can be explained on only one assumption. The main Ajanta style expressed a fundamental aspect of Indian sensibility, and in responding to India, Amrita Sher-Gil became herself more vitally and deeply Indian. Indian qualities of feeling took command, and the result was a style which despite its Western affinities had a vital relation to this ancient Indian form. Indianness of feeling was, in fact, the clue to Indianness of style, and because Amrita Sher-Gil was deeply moved by India her greatest pictures are Indian in character.

It is this hypothesis which helps to explain the changed character of her work during the years 1938 to 1941. In 1941 she suddenly died from pneumonia. The years in question are therefore not merely the second but the last phase of her art. Yet, with one important exception—the pictures painted in 1938 to 1939 after a visit to Hungary—none of the paintings in this second phase rival those in the first. Intense emotion is lacking, and instead of expressing the tensions of the modern age, she produced a series of pictures which are mere arrangements of colour. The human response to India has vanished and in its place has emerged a simple interest in technique.

Such a *volte-face* requires an explanation, and we can perhaps discover it in the mood of bitter disillusion which gradually developed after her first few years in India. On her return in 1934 her response had been that of lively compassion. Compassion had also seemed in keeping with contemporary opinion. But other painters were blandly unaware of a 'new' or 'modern' India, and wherever she turned for support she was met with open disdain or bitter hostility. Between an artist nourished on Western painting of a vital kind and artists of the neo-Bengal school there could obviously be little sympathy, yet it was precisely the work of these latter artists which found popular favour. Neglect of her own work, the popularity of theirs—it was this contrast which embittered her, causing her to question the very reasons for her painting.

The situation was even worse when viewed from a wider angle, for between the activities of social and political workers and those of artists, there proved, in practice, to be a yawning gulf. Those who were moved by the village had no feeling for art. Those concerned with art had no sense of 'contemporary reality'. Amrita Sher-Gil's pictures presupposed a public, but were received by a void. She was an artist attempting to fulfil a social function in a society incapable of understanding her message. 'I am starving for appreciation,' she wrote to Karl Khandalavala in 1940, 'literally famished. My work is understood and liked, less and less, as time goes on.' This rejection by the very India whose spirit she had tried to express inevitably induced a gradual revulsion—'great soulful eyes in a melancholy face—romantic, you know. I have outgrown that sort of thing.'

This reaction would have had serious consequences in any artist; but in Amrita Sher-Gil, sensitive and emotional to a degree, it was particularly deadly. It caused her, in the first place, to shrink from portraying any further aspect of the India she had loved, to stifle her sympathy, to develop, in its place, a hard protective crust. It extinguished delight and damaged all feelings of identity. But above all, it gave a new direction to her whole emotional life. Instead of immersing herself in India she now regarded Europe with nostalgia. It was in Paris that her type of art had been valued, and it is symptomatic of her state of mind that it was only during a visit to Hungary that her stifled emotions revived. In the pictures which were planned there in 1938 but painted in India in 1939, the early excitement is present. The style has the same inner power, and there is once again a passionate identification with village scenes.

In India, on the other hand, emotion was out of place, and she turned instead to problems of technique. It was no longer what she painted that mattered. It was merely the method.

'I don't know whether it is a passing phase or a durable change in my outlook [she wrote to Karl Khandalavala in April 1938], but I see in a more detached manner and more ironically than I have ever done. Less "humanely", if you like to put it that way but also less romantically. That is why at the moment I am fonder of the Moghuls, the Rajputs, the Jains than of Ajanta. Also I am terribly fond of *painting*. I grow more and more fond of it, of *painting* itself if you know what I mean. I wish you could see the things I have done recently. There is a village scene I painted in the U.P. with a vermilion clay elephant in the foreground, on the pale yellowish ground (Fig. 27). A row of little archaic figures at the back with trees and little clay huts that I am very fond of. . . . I have tried to give all the figures in these pictures the flat relief of cardboard figures pasted on to canvas.'

And at the same time she wrote, 'I want to bring out the contrast between the hot reds and greens one finds in the early Rajput miniatures that I love so. I cannot control my appetite for colour.'

Such an obsession with abstract colour, with colour viewed independently of all emotional associations, had only one consequence—a drying-up of the picture's significance. Paintings such as *Elephants Bathing*[1] with its shrill greens or *Camels Resting*[2] with its strident reds are trivial and vapid in the extreme. This is village life as a travel poster might show it. Amrita Sher-Gil, the interpreter of modern India, had died in 1937.

[1] Karl Khandalavala, *op. cit.*, pl. 9.

[2] *Ibid.*, pl. 19.

VI

Art and the Primitive

JAMINI ROY

THE two artists we have just considered represent distinctive trends in modern art. The first, Rabindranath Tagore, was not concerned with the exterior world. His source of inspiration was the unconscious, and although the final result expressed a very definite attitude to life, it was not induced by conscious methods. The second, Amrita Sher-Gil, was the exact opposite. Her art was based on subjects. She looked outwards rather than within, and her normal practice was to paint from models. The first projected his own inner stresses. The second embodied the interests of her generation. Both were Indians, both were unusually sensitive and as a consequence their art stood in vital relationship to modern India. In one respect, however, their approaches were identical. Warned perhaps by the unhappy example of the neo-Bengal movement, each was chary of employing previous Indian styles. In point of fact, as we have seen, their work had clear affinities with certain types of Indian art, but these affinities were by-products of the creative process rather than consciously induced effects. Modern art rather than Indian was their starting-point, and in this respect each is a clear illustration of the same artistic method.

The artist we must now consider stands in sharp contrast. While the misery of the villager was haunting political India, other aspects of village life had suddenly posed a startling problem. If the true India lay in the countryside, might not the same be said of art? And although his words have a very restricted application, Havell himself had anticipated this position in a significant passage. Art, he had written, has been 'driven from the great cities of India, it has no part in our civic life and its last refuge is now in the villages'. And he added, 'This last refuge will always be its surest stronghold. In the villages of India the true artistic spirit still survives and if we and educated Indians would know what true Indian art is, we must go there, where the heart of India beats.'

This passage appears in the first edition of his book, *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, and must therefore have been written before 1908. But it possesses a certain air of abstract theorizing for, so far as actual village art was concerned, Havell seems to have been ignorant. Bengali art, he considered, was defunct, and it was this belief which 'compelled him', as G. S. Dutt has said, 'to lead his Bengali pupils for models as well as inspiration to the vestiges of the ruins of the Mughal and Rajput courts'.

> 'It would certainly have been a surprise to him [Dutt remarks] to have been told that in the neglected villages of western Bengal, there survived all the time a continuous stream of living art tradition'; [that there still persisted] 'the extraordinary genius for "colour music" and rhythmic expression which marks our Bengali race and which is still preserved intact by the unlettered men and women in our villages—a "colour music" which is one of those subtle refinements which have elevated the national culture of India in the past, which the vulgarity of the life and the pseudo-culture of our cities has completely killed among our educated and semi-educated classes; but which yet survives in the remote parts of rural Bengal beautifying the village homes.' (*The Art of Bengal.*)

This Bengali tradition of village art was discovered in the nineteen-twenties, and due to work first by Ajit Ghose and later by G. S. Dutt himself, its character became apparent. In almost every district of West Bengal, colonies of *patuas* or village artists were found to exist. Many of these gained a livelihood by decorating earthenware plates and pitchers and by painting the clay images of gods and goddesses used at annual festivals. Some, however, still followed the exact profession suggested by the title, *patua*. This word derives from *pata*, a painted cloth, and in districts such as Birbhum, Murshidabad, Midnapore, Hooghly, Burdwan and Bankura, there were *patuas* who still painted long scrolls made up of or backed by cloth. In these scrolls the deeds of Krishna, the adventures of Rama (Fig. 40) and the tortures of the damned were depicted in a number of panels, scene following scene as the scroll was gradually unwound. In Birbhum, Bankura and the Santal Parganas (a district in the adjoining province of Bihar), a favourite theme was Satyapir, a Muslim holy man who rode on a leopard, while other popular subjects were the myths of the Santals. Such scrolls were not intended for sale but rather to equip the artist for a second important function—that of a wandering minstrel. Covering a radius of ten to fifteen miles from his home, the *patua* would go from village to village, squatting on the ground, gathering an audience about him, displaying his scrolls and intoning their contents. In Hindu villages he would concentrate on stories of Rama and Krishna, but in Santal areas he would sing of the creation of the world, of Sing Bonga, Marang Buru and other Santal spirits. The actual style of painting differed from district to district—indeed in many cases from village to village—but in every case there was a firm reliance on certain basic principles. There was no attempt at literal description or meticulous portrayal. Shapes and figures were freely distorted. Sharp outlines and strong colours were used, and the result was an art of tough resilience, vividly expressing the robust vitality of village life.

There remained one other type of painting—the bazaar paintings of Kalighat in Calcutta (Figs. 31 and 43). These pictures had grown up under Western influence at the beginning of the nineteenth century and were made on thin paper sold by the *patuas* to pilgrims at the Kalighat temple. Their subjects were gods and goddesses, but scenes of Bengali life, local scandals, birds, fishes, snakes and animals were also illustrated. Such pictures were sold at half an anna or one anna each and were taken home by pilgrims and pinned to the walls of houses. Unlike scroll paintings they were executed in water-colour, not gouache, shading was used to indicate volume, and backgrounds were normally left bare. Like scroll paintings, however, they displayed the freest possible approach to human forms, the Kalighat artist with his deft brush specializing in rapid flowing curves and daring washes of glowing colour.

These types of village art were now to excite Bengali artists, and for two distinct reasons. We have already seen that one of the more biting criticisms of the neo-Bengal school had been its un-Bengali character. Bengal had revolted from the 'dead blank of the arts' which had come about due to British methods of art instruction. But instead of returning to Bengali forms of expression, Havell and Abanindranath had adopted northern Indian painting. In this they had certainly been acting from the best of motives, but the upshot had been deeply wounding to Bengali pride. The discovery of an art that was truly Bengali rectified this grievance.

'Whatever the position this old national tradition of Bengal art may ultimately hold in the hierarchy of art either of India or of the world generally [G. S.

> Dutt proclaimed], it has the significance and a value for Bengalis which is entirely independent of its comparative worth in relation to other schools of art. For the art of this school is pre-eminently the art of Bengal; and to us in Bengal the art tradition of the rural *patuas* of our province, be it ever so humble, represents nothing less than our mother language in art, just as much as the primitive Bengali of Chandidas and of the Vaishnava poets represents the mother tongue in literature of the Bengali people. It would be unwise on the part of our Bengali artists, under the influence of a misleading cosmopolitanism, to refuse to embrace this ancient and still living art tradition of Bengal as their own other language in art, as the only art language in which their creative genius can find proper scope for its growth and expansion. Our artists may and will undoubtedly enrich this old art language with new beauties and powers undreamt of by the old masters, just as Rabindranath has enriched the language of Chandidas with beauties and powers undreamt of by the latter but accept this ancient and indigenous art tradition they must as their basic language if all our efforts at artistic expression are not to end in national barrenness, (*The Art of Bengal.*)

It was because the art of the Bengal village assuaged Bengali feelings and contributed to Bengali morale that its systems of lines and colours suddenly acquired a new and vital appeal.

This aspect was obviously important, but a second consideration bulked larger still. Writing in 1926 of the bazaar paintings of Kalighat, Ajit Ghose claimed that they anticipated Cubism and Impressionism and 'indeed much of the latest in modern art'. And in an article discussing the scroll paintings of village *patuas*, G. S. Dutt pointed out that their chief qualities—'freshness, simplicity, directness, robustness and power of vivid story-telling'—were precisely those most valued in modern painting. 'From the point of view of conception as well as of technique, it will be found that the basic characteristic of the art of the *patuas* is the one which the Post-Impressionists of the West have been striving to attain, namely the elimination of all unessentials and a dependence on fundamentals.' Such claims are perhaps too tall to be sustained, but of the general affinities between these two kinds of art there can be no doubt. The Bengali artist who sensed this relationship and, as a result, solved not only his private problems but those of this generation was Jamini Roy.

Jamini Roy was born in 1887 in Beliatore, in the Bankura district of West

Bengal. The circumstance is not without importance, for not only were Bengali village artists still producing scrolls there but the district also contained colonies of Santals. It was therefore in an atmosphere of village painting and among a people particularly attractive to sensitive Bengalis that the young Jamini Roy was reared. During his boyhood, however, neither circumstance seems to have been of conscious significance, and when in 1903 he joined the Government School of Art in Calcutta, at the early age of sixteen, he had no particular views on art and was at the mercy of the neo-Bengal system of artistic instruction. This system, although much modified by Havell's influence, was still closely modelled on Western lines, and as a result he acquired a competent academic technique and began to execute portraits in oils. A little later he succumbed to the wistful sentimentality of the Abanindranath style, and there are two pictures in the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, which illustrate this special phase. Two Santal girls are shown, stooping to draw water, their fresh and vigorous forms invested in murky gloom. As pictures, both have all the tepid uncertainty of the prevailing school, but in the light of the artist's later career, the choice of subject is important. They suggest that in the nineteen-tens, which is when the two pictures were probably painted, nostalgia for his village home was setting in, and that, as a consequence; the painting of Santals was satisfying some deeply felt requirement of his nature.

For some years Jamini Roy painted in this manner, earning his living by academic portraits in oils yet all the time oppressed by a growing sense of futility. The vapid frivolities of modern Calcutta, the squalor of a sprawling industrialized city, these induced in him a deep revulsion and in about the year 1925 this aversion showed itself in a sudden repudiation of his earlier manner. He commenced to paint only those themes which vitally concerned him, and at the same time deliberately experimented with the style used by the painters of Kalighat. Between about the years 1925 and 1931, in fact, he sloughed his former neo-Bengal manner and relied increasingly on firm and bounding contours, majestic curves and simple forms. An early study in this new style is a portrait of a Santal girl (Fig. 30), possibly painted in 1925 and now in the Municipal Museum, Allahabad. Certain neo-Bengal mannerisms still remain, but already there is a new and vital exultation in strong, robust form. Further simplifications appear in yet another *Santal Girl* in the Stella Kramrisch collection,[1] where an air of simple grandeur is evoked by bounding

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[1] Bishnu Dey and John Irwin, *Jamini Roy* (Calcutta, 1944), pl. 2.

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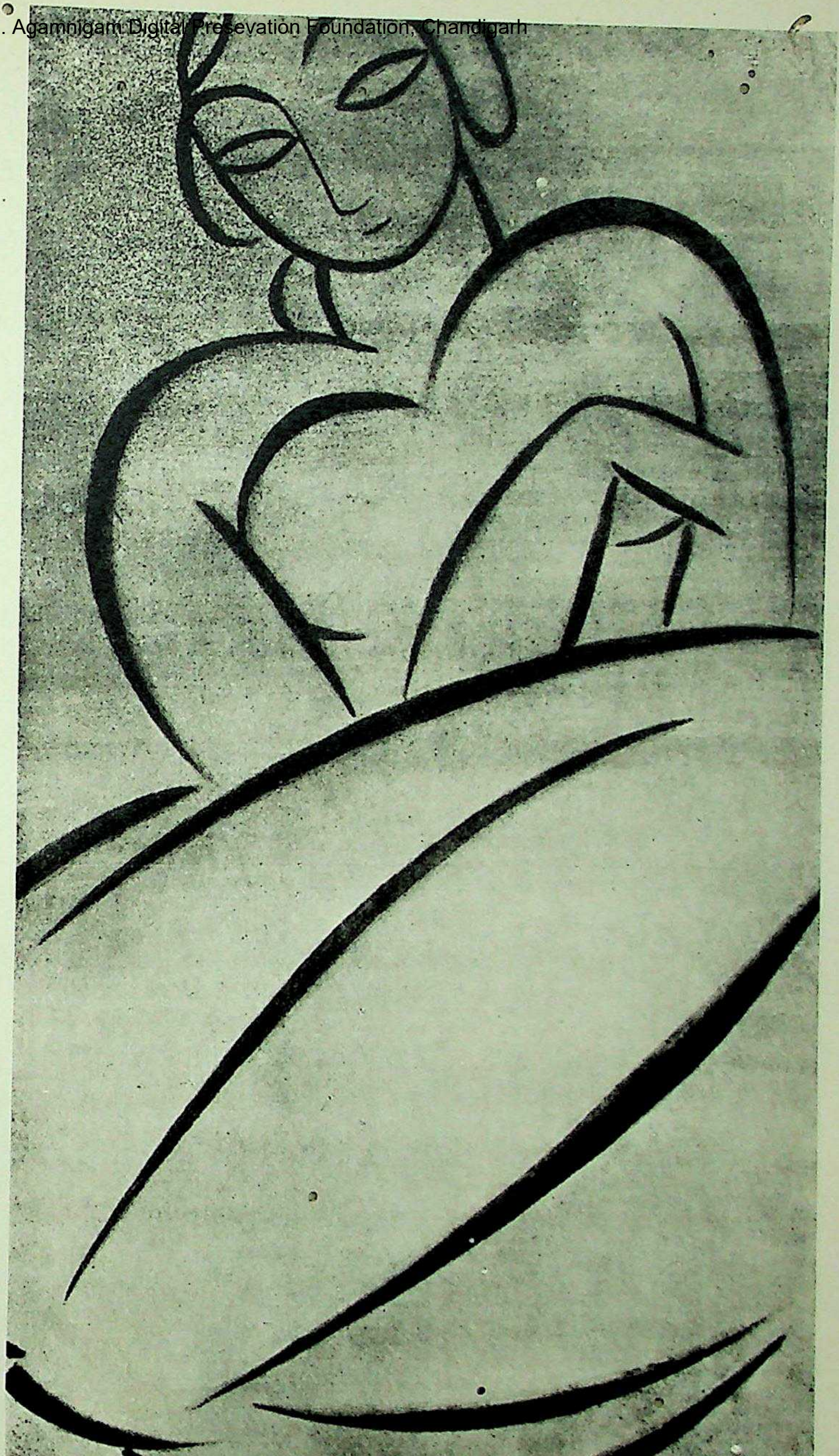
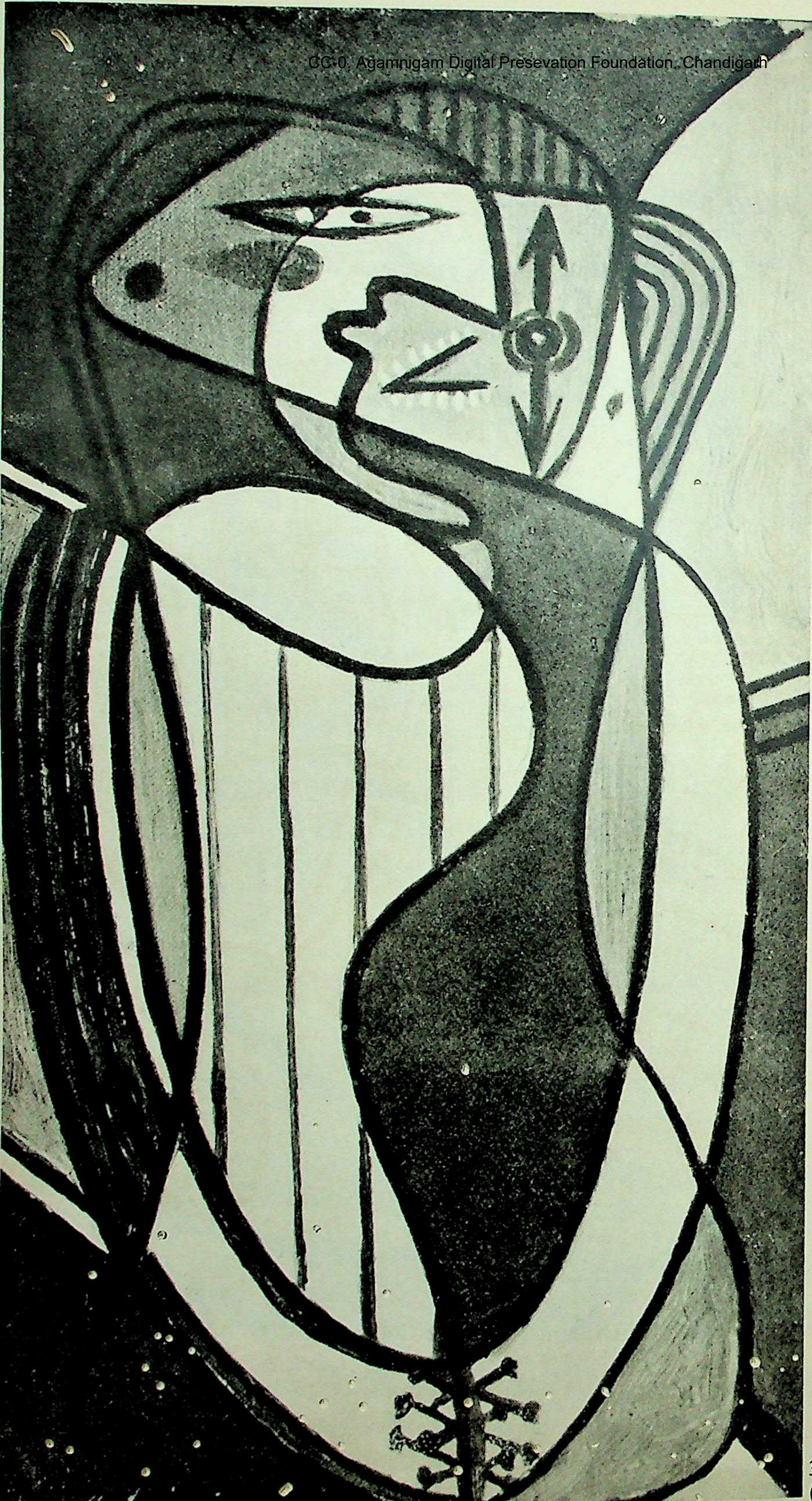
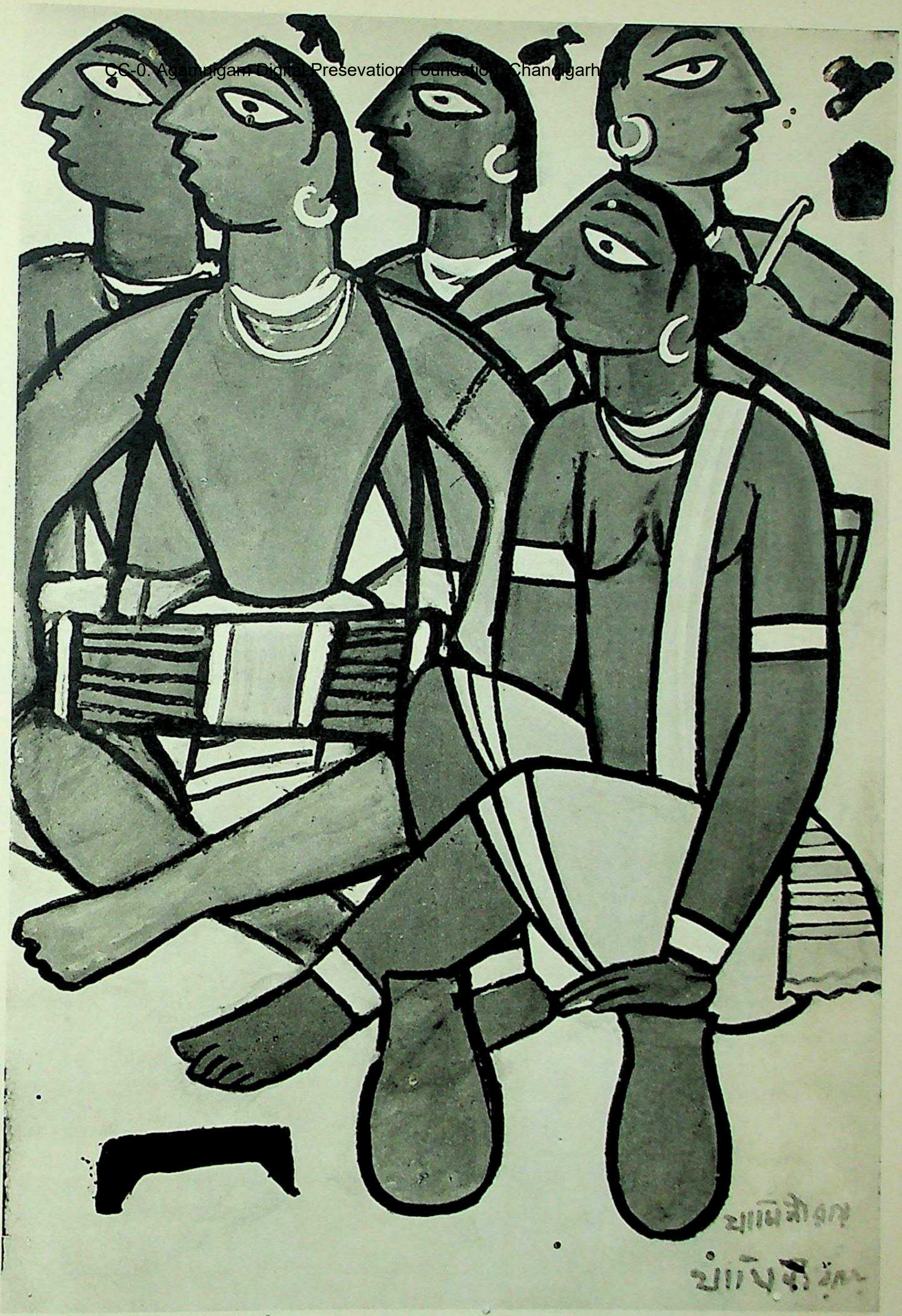


32. JAMINI ROY
Santal Girl, *c.* 1930



33. PICASSO. Portrait, 192
(*Cahiers d' Art*, II, 1927).



34. JAMINI ROY. Santal Drummers, *c.* 1936. Collection W. G. Archer.

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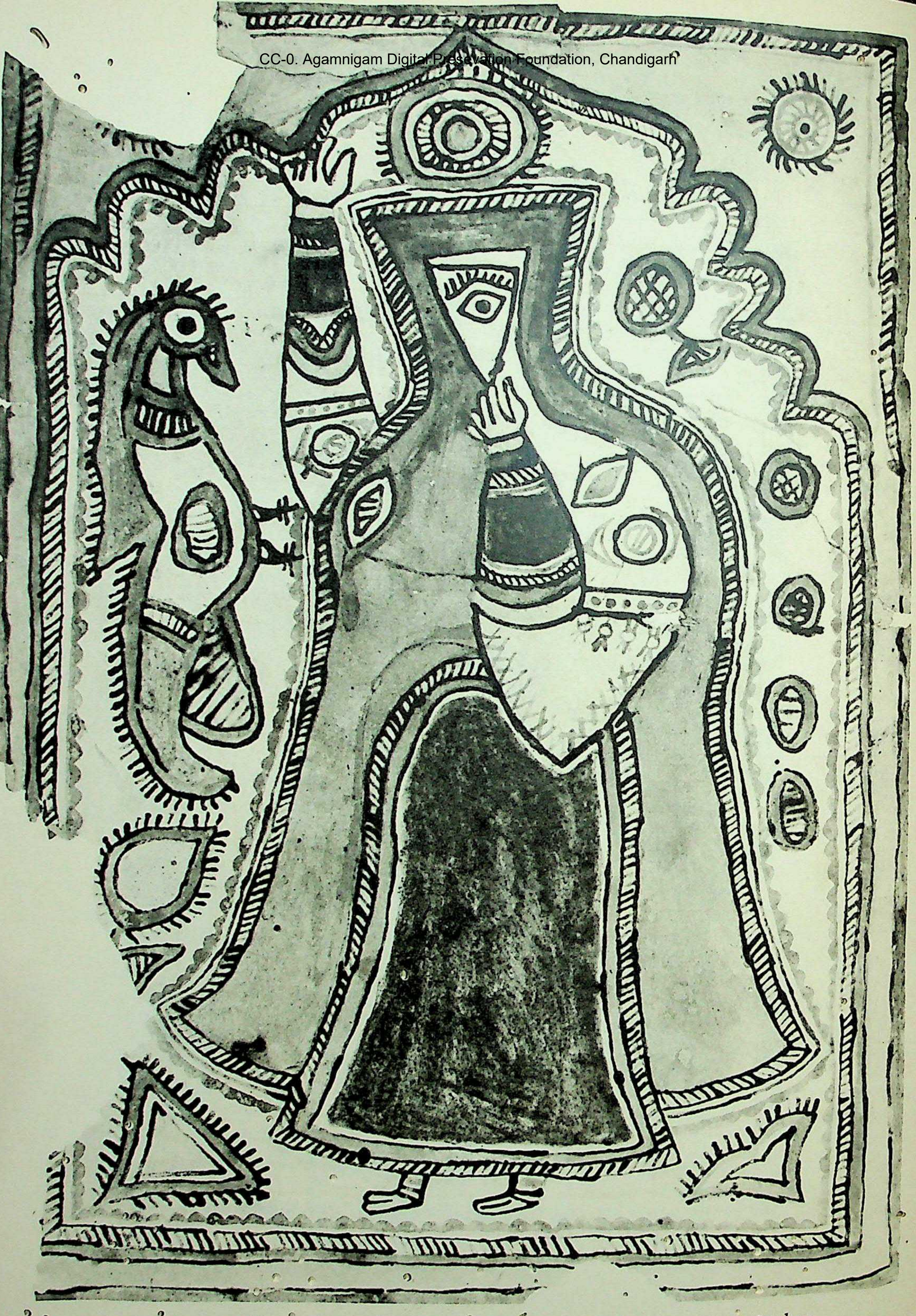
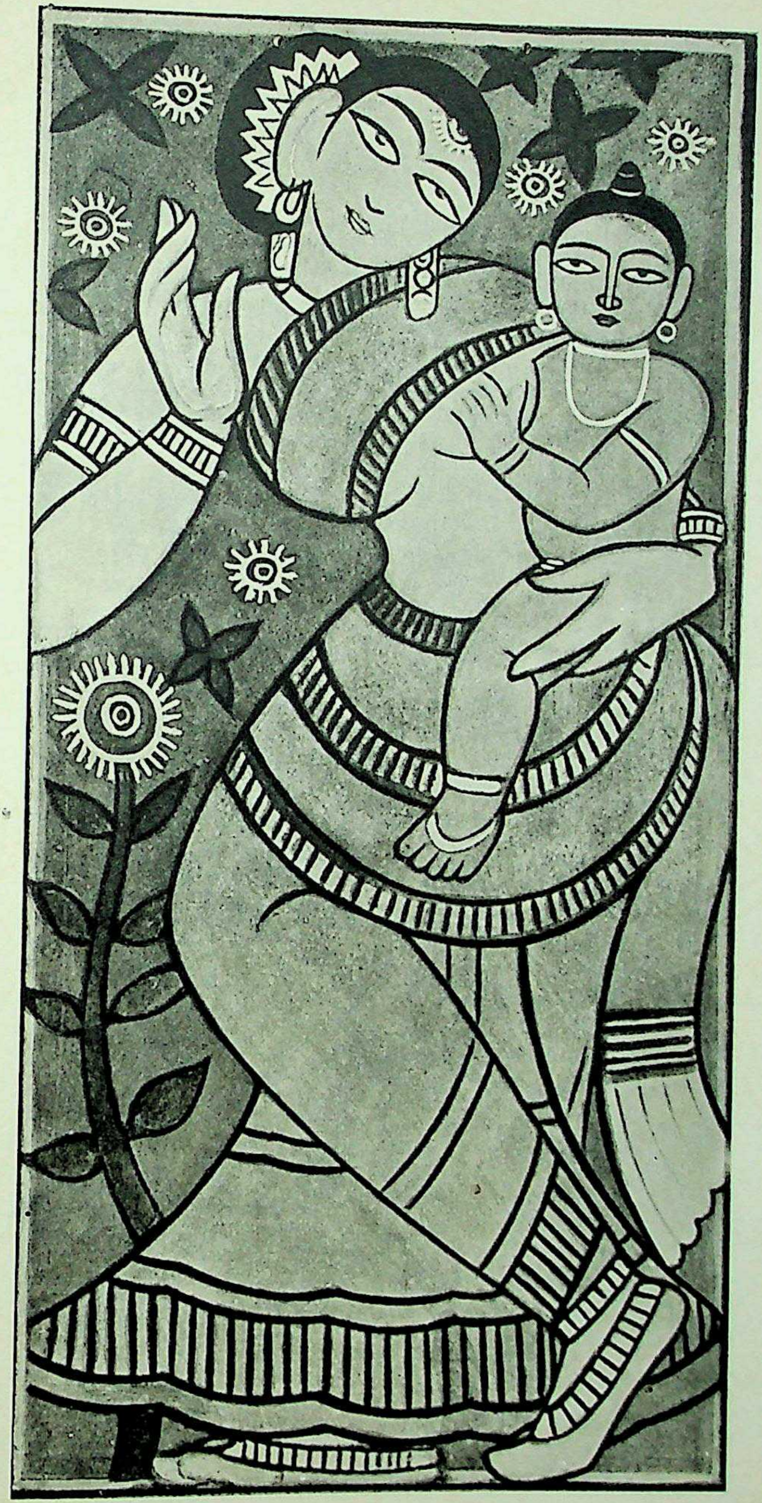
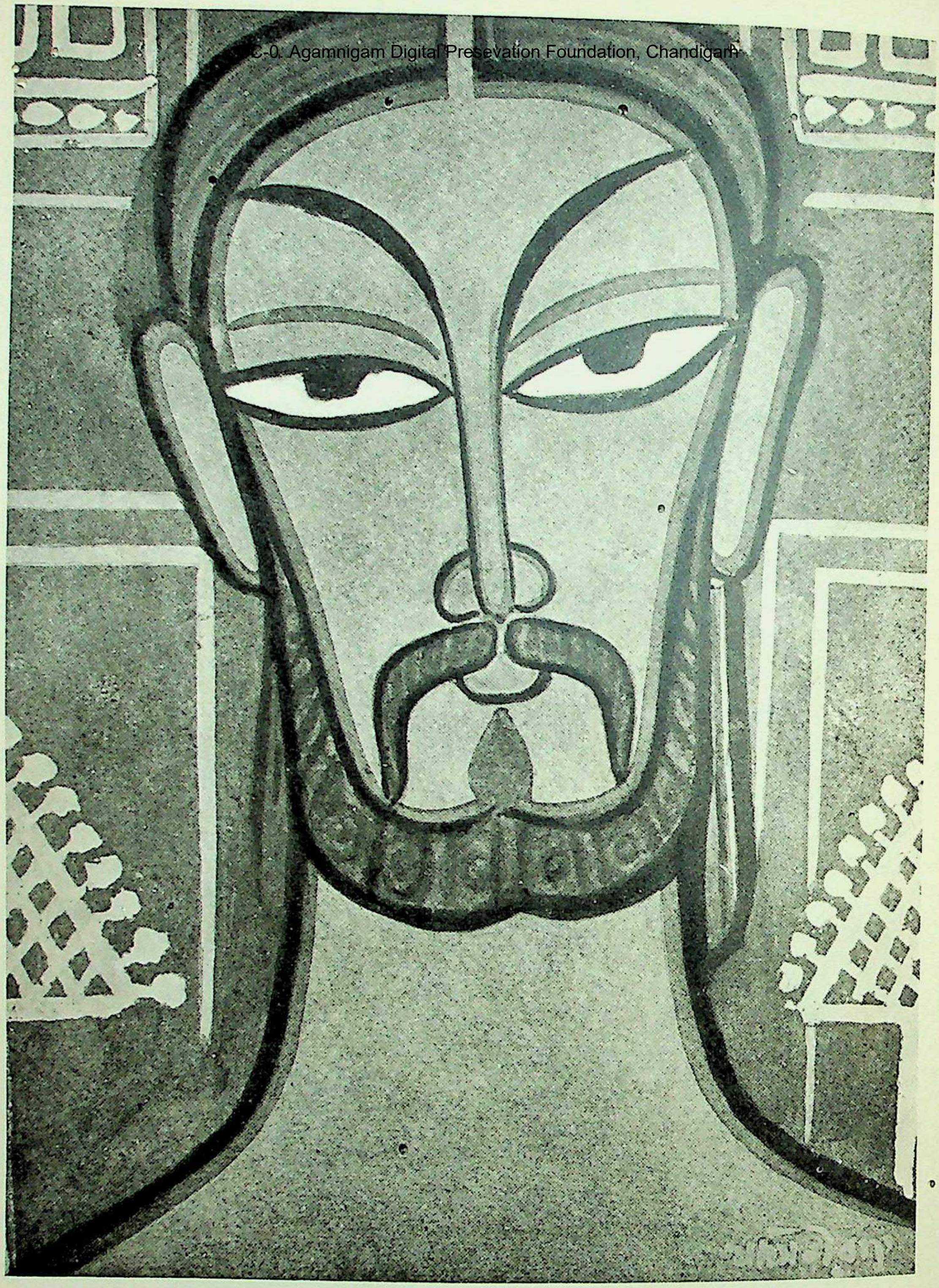


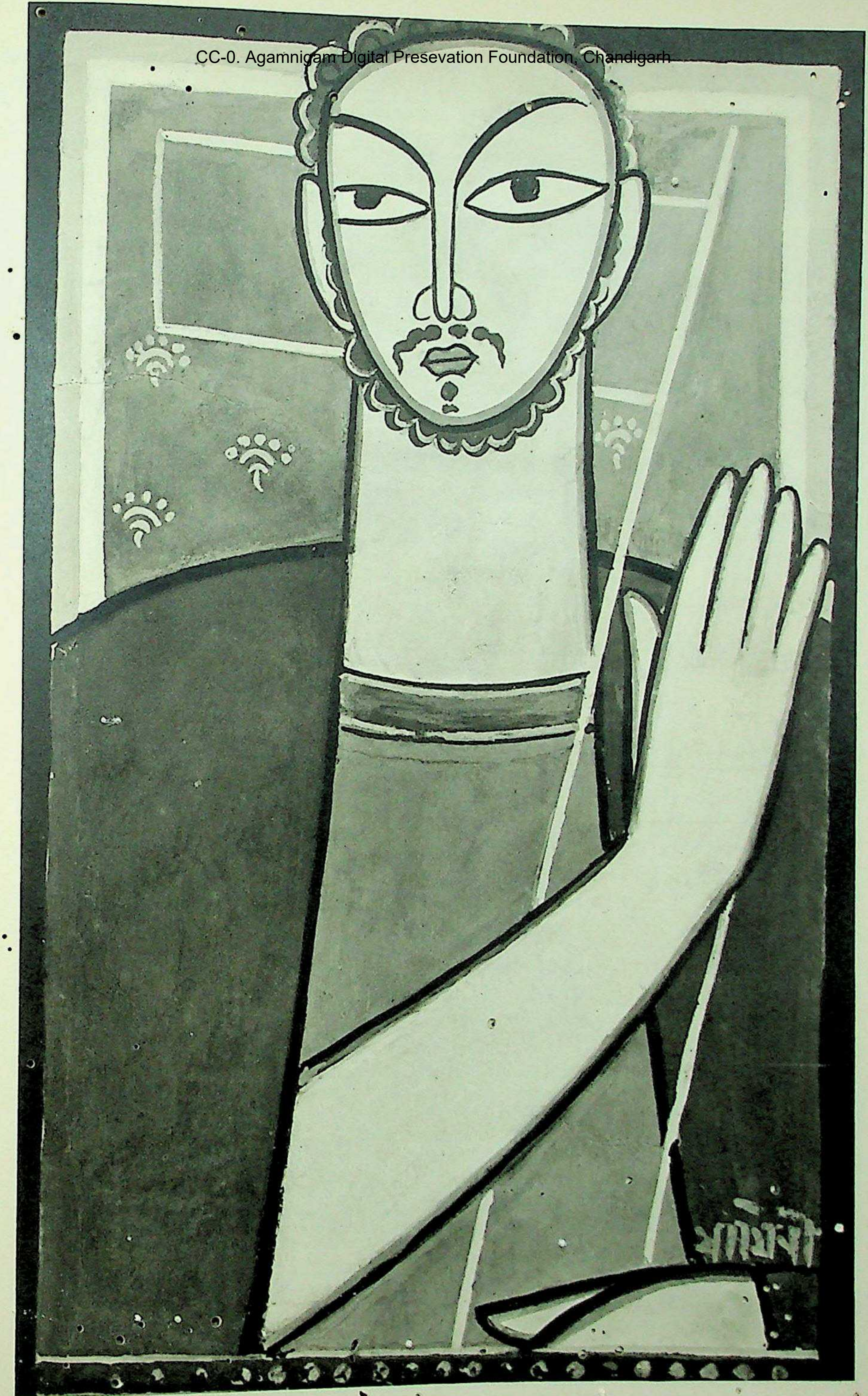
35. Bride and Parrot. Village painting, Mithila, Bihar, *c.* 1920. Collection W. G. Archer



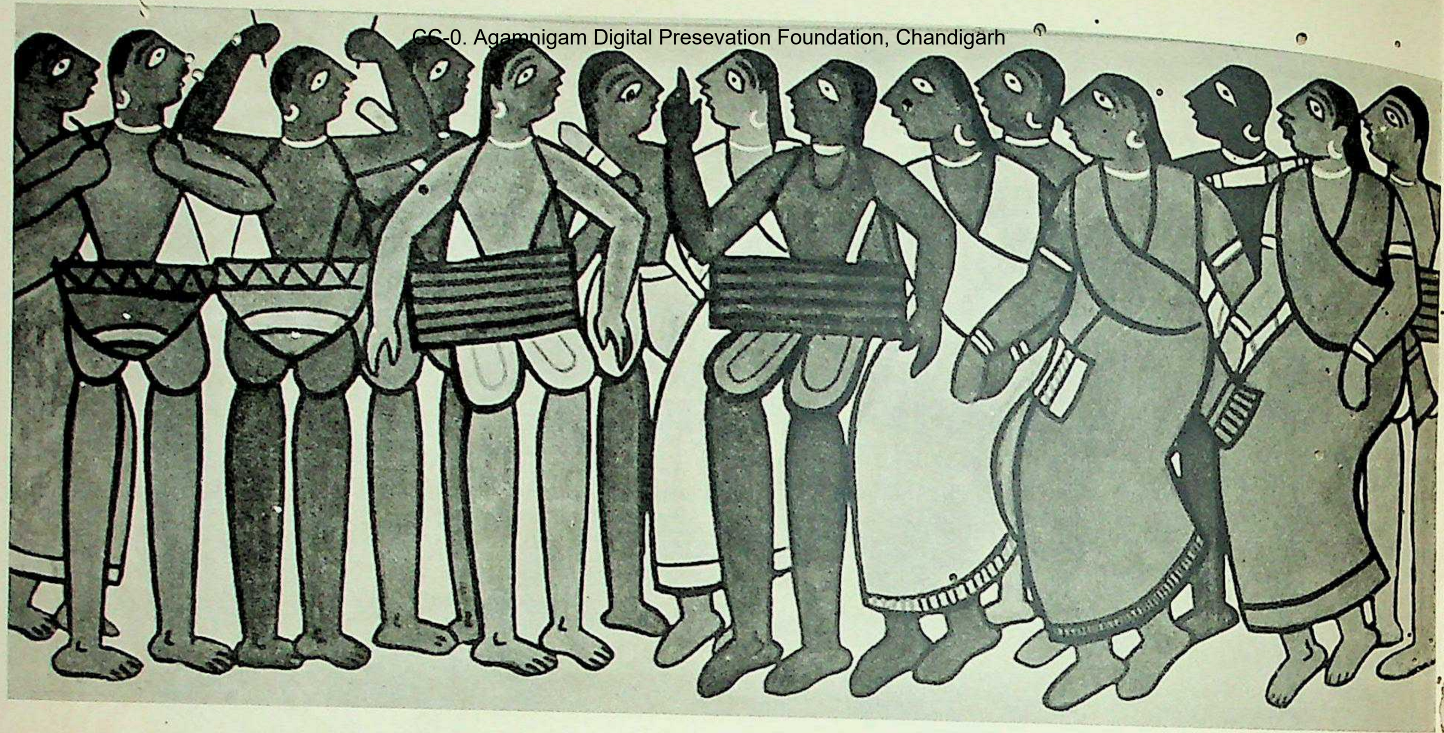
36. JAMINI ROY. Mother and Child, *c.* 1931
Collection Mrs Pranati Dey



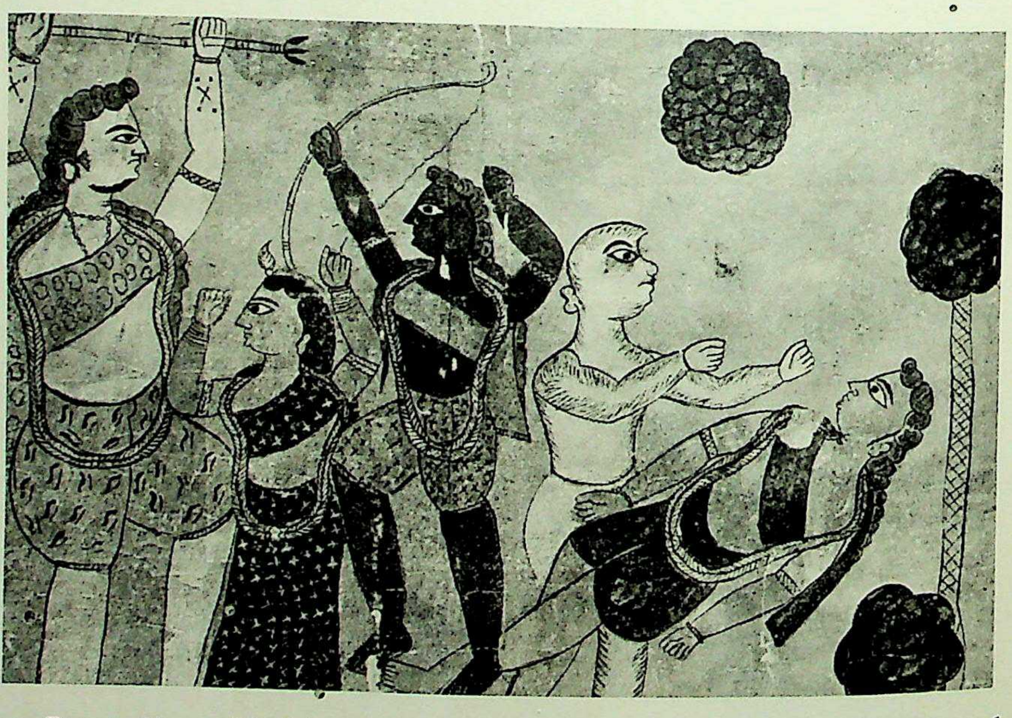
37. JAMINI ROY. Head of Christ, *c.* 1938. Collection Cyprian Blagden



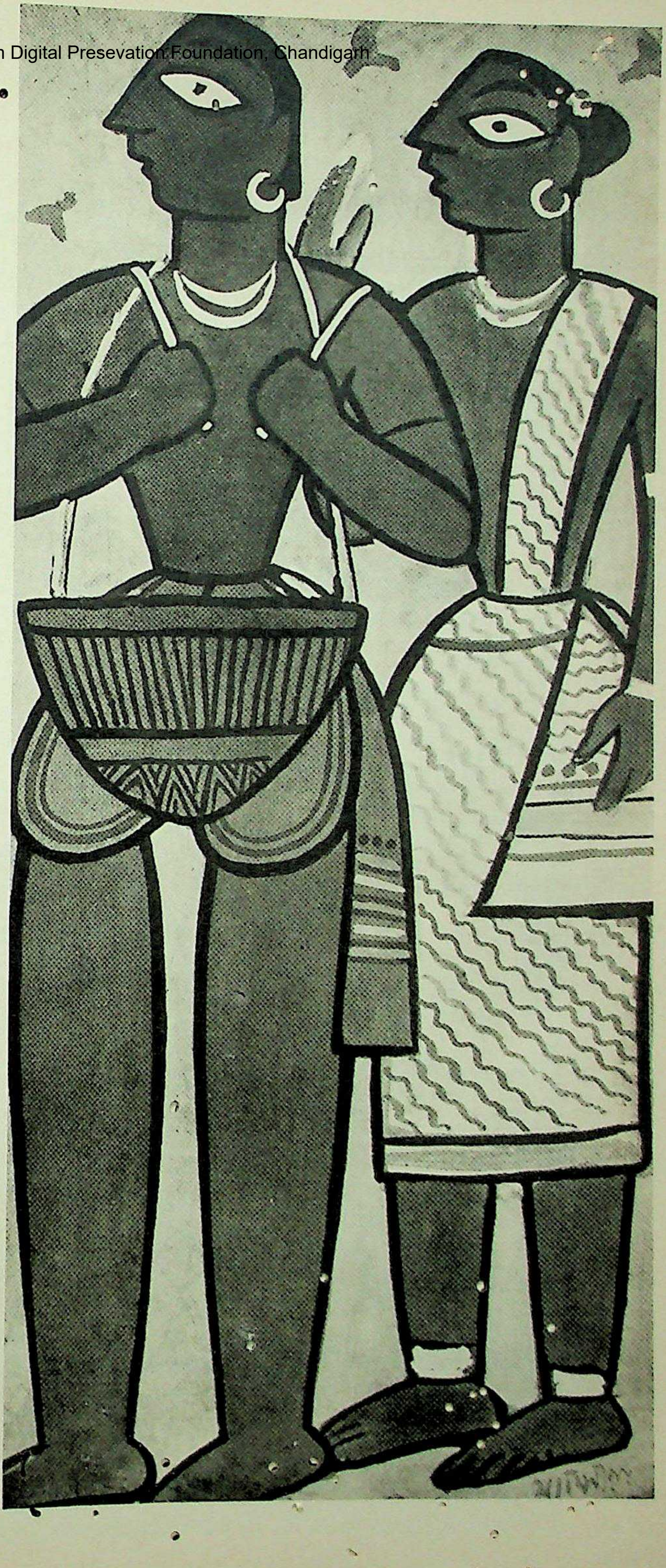
38. JAMINI ROY. Christ with the Cross, *c.* 1940. Collection W. G. Archer



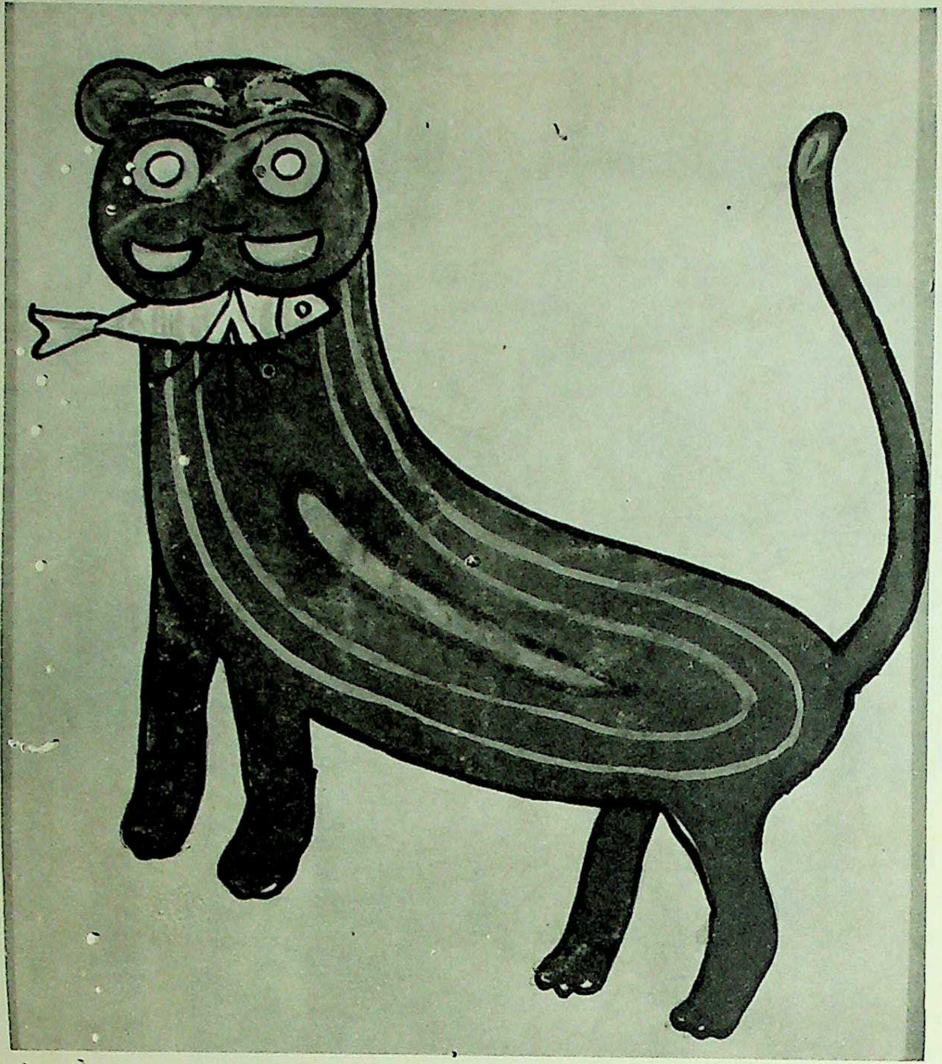
39. JAMINI ROY. Santal Dance, *c.* 1934. Collection Mrs Mrinalini Emerson



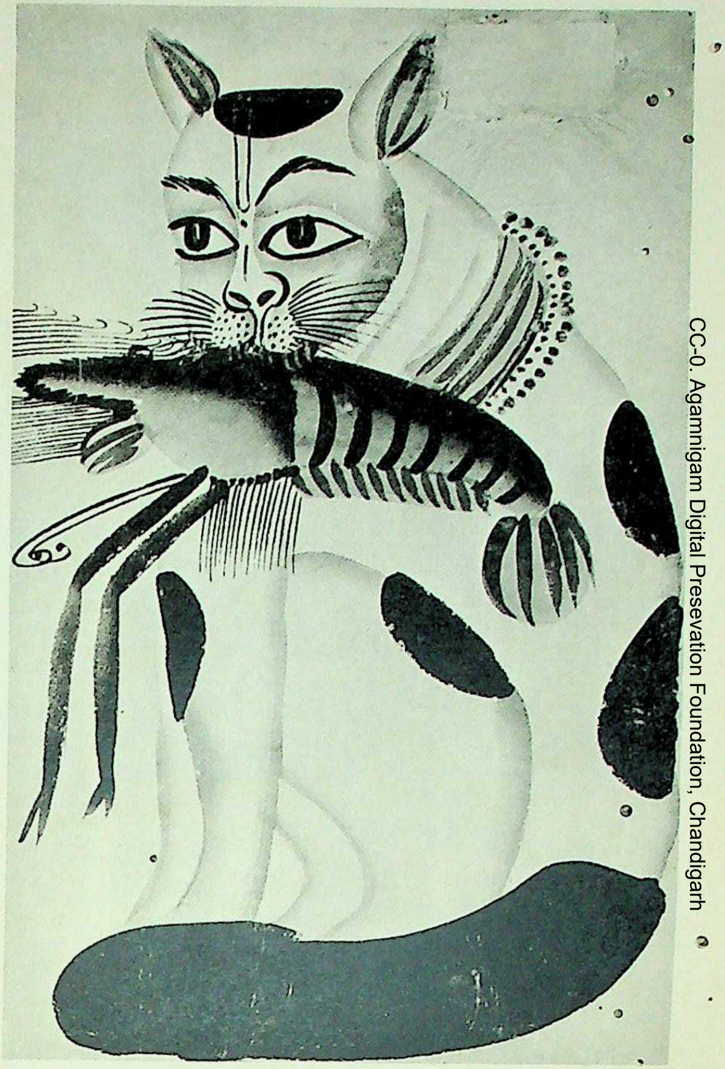
40. Rama, Sita and Lakshman in the Forest. Scroll Painting, Hooghly, Bengal *c.* 1800. Asutosh Museum, Calcutta



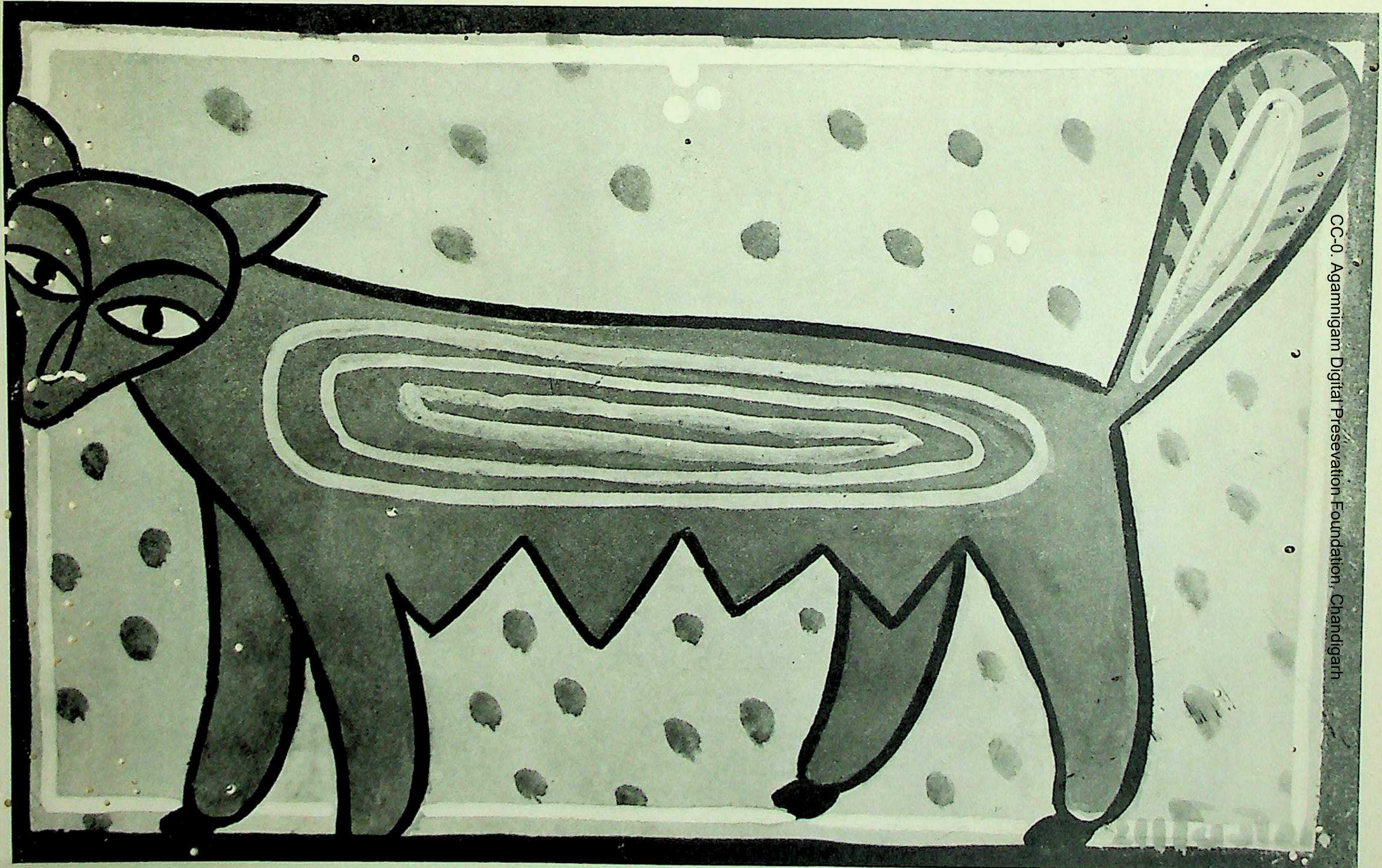
41. JAMINI ROY. Santal Couple
c. 1934. Collection W. G. Archer



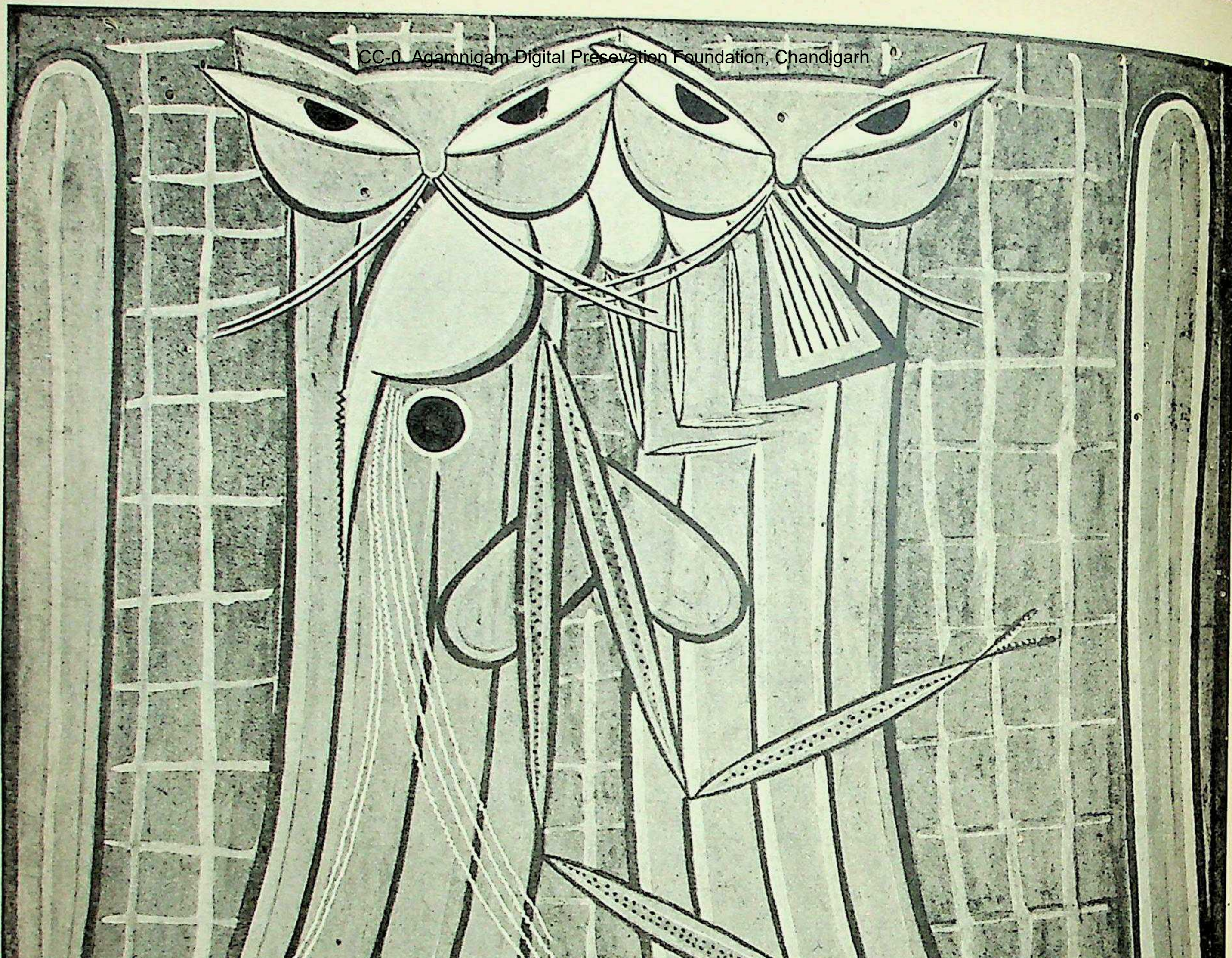
42. JAMINI ROY. Cat with Fish, *c.* 1942. Collection John Irwin



43. Cat with Prawn. Kalighat, Calcutta, *c.* 1880. Indian Institute, Oxford



44. JAMINI ROY. Vixen, *c.* 1941. Collection John Irwin



45. JAMINI ROY. Two Cats with Prawn, *c.* 1950. Collection Thomas J. Needham

State Museum, LUCKNOW.

lines reinforced by rich and sombre colours. The girl is shown arranging her hair, and once again there is a free surrender to the sweeping dip in her back and the springing curves of her large magnificent body. Both pictures are representational, the poses are naturalistic, but the treatment reveals a new reliance on rhythm and the simple power of summary forms.

The latter picture was probably painted in about 1928, and from then on, until 1931, Jamini Roy rapidly developed his new robust manner. On the one hand, he relied more and more on the daring simplicities of Kalighat painting, but, on the other, he endowed each composition with greater and greater subtlety. During these years, in fact, the relation of his work to that of bazaar painting is not unlike that of Picasso to negro sculpture. Certain stylistic idioms are absorbed. A wholly new approach to painting begins to be apparent. A basic relationship is evident enough. The borrowing mind, on the other hand, is so much more adult and sensitive that the result is strongly original.

The themes adopted between 1925 and 1931 are often, but not exclusively, Santal. Indeed a number of paintings show ordinary Bengali mothers. Yet a bias in favour of Santal subjects is very clear, and we must pause for a moment to consider what Santals had come to stand for in his city-bound existence. We have seen how distaste for Calcutta, the vast cosmopolitan city, had led him to adopt the art of Kalighat, a suburb. A similar reaction against the city-dweller himself led him to concentrate on Santals. As we have seen from Rabindranath's poems, the Santals were notable for their simple honesty, innocent bearing and courage in the face of hardship. And although Jamini's own relations with them were probably more shy and withdrawn, we can gain an idea of how deeply the Santals may have impressed him from the account of another sensitive Bengali, Sudhin N. Ghose.

'Though I did not then take the criticism seriously [Sudhin Ghose writes in his novel *Cradle of the Clouds*], it came to my mind spontaneously the day I heard the Second Master denouncing the Santals as savages. I felt deeply hurt. I was genuinely fond of them. I was enamoured of their broad-hipped and ample-bosomed matrons clad in blue saris with vermilion and saffron hems. Those wearing red oleanders and yellow poppies in their jet black hair were for me sylvan goddesses. Their movements were so graceful, their laughter so infectious and their glances so haunting. The dreams of my wakeful hours were peopled by them. I simply adored the Santal women and all that went with them: the water jars shaped like amphoras, their heavy bangles fitted with tiny berry-like bells, their coral necklets and floral necklaces, and in particular, their bouncing babies with big eyes filled with water. It was a pleasure to watch them carried astride their mothers' backs or straddled across their fathers' shoulders.'

Jamini Roy's own reactions can hardly have been quite the same—they were probably more ascetic—but during his years of exile in Calcutta it was the essential sordidness of city life, its stark indifference to such simple moral qualities as kindness, honesty and affection which seems to have stunned him, causing him to recall with ardent admiration the Santals of his youth.

This attitude, clear and uncompromising, must be distinguished from any cult of the village for, although Santals were Indian villagers, Sudhin Ghose's passage makes clear that being non-Aryan and pre-Dravidian, in fact racially quite different from Bengali Hindus, they were regarded by Hindus as in a special category—being to Bengalis what primitive Mexicans were to D. H. Lawrence or tinkers to the Irish artist, Louis Le Brocquy.

'There is something rich and alive in these people [says Kate in Lawrence's novel, *The Plumed Serpent*]. She was attracted, almost fascinated by the strange nuclear power of the men in the circle. Here and here alone, it seemed to her, life burned with a deep new fire. The rest of life, as she knew it, seemed wan, bleached and sterile. The pallid wanness and weariness of her world! And here, the dark, ruddy figures in the glare of a torch, like the centre of the everlasting fire, surely this was a new kindling of mankind.'

And of the tinkers of Eire, and their fascination for Le Brocquy, Earnan O'Malley has said:

'Their aloofness, intractability and fierce independence interested Le Brocquy. They were, he could see, outside the closely organised life of the parish unit, looked on with mistrust and suspicion but generally treated with the tolerance given in the country to groups outside parish life. They became a symbol of the individual as opposed to the organised, settled society, and to the growing power-control of the State; a symbol, also, of the distressed and dispossessed people of Europe wandering unlike the tinkers, without hope of changing their condition by individual effort. For the creative artist they could represent the artist who deals in the unexpected and unrecognised, and who suffuses with meaning familiar things against the inanition of their too facile and unmeaning acceptance.'

We need not suppose that Santals meant all these things to Jamini Roy, but his repeated recourse to Santal themes and investment of Santal figures with nobility and pride proves how keenly he valued their moral qualities. And although another factor was actually to prove of greater significance, a response by him to such qualities accounts in part for the more mature style which marks his work from about 1931 onwards.

The characteristics of this style can be shortly resumed. It involved, in the first place, the abrupt abandonment of the Kalighat technique in favour of idioms more directly based on the scroll paintings of Hooghly and Bankura. These idioms were, in every way, more angular and geometric, involving amongst others the use of harsh straight lines instead of soft and yielding curves. The exact reasons for this change will be suggested in a moment, but it is significant that Sudhindranath Datta in an essay published in *Longmans Miscellany* compares the Kalighat style with that of a particular kind of scroll painting current in Vishnupur, a town in Murshidabad.

'Neither [he says] were instances of racial purity. The former bore the clear stamp of Europe, its stylised naturalism deriving patently from that source while the latter, though of obvious local origin, had about it an air of tottering courts where pleasure more than order was the impulse behind design.'

In discarding the Kalighat style, therefore, Jamini Roy was repudiating even more firmly the artificialities of Calcutta life. To escape the city, we might say, he had gone to the suburb. To escape the suburb he now went to the village. And although other factors were also present, the impulse to immerse himself in the village is shown in one other development—his deliberate change of palette. Abandoning the European and Chinese colours which he had previously used, he now resorted to the mineral and vegetable dyes current in villages. This recourse to village colours closely accords with his adoption of *patua* idioms, and we can only conclude that after freeing himself from the city-inspired neo-Bengal movement, he felt an imperative need to identify himself still further with village ideals.

Such feelings undoubtedly helped to condition his new style, but the factor which was ultimately decisive requires more careful analysis. Although his early studies of Santal girls had shown a keen appreciation of their grand physiques, the style which he now evolved was the very reverse of the poetic, sensuous or passionate. If we take the French painter Renoir as a modern artist whose work most clearly embodies these particular qualities, no artist could stand in greater contrast to him than the later Jamini Roy. His style after 1931 is totally devoid of sensuous excitement. It is notable rather for its brusque harshness, proud defiance and callous indifference to all that is soft, affectionate, warm or yielding. There must clearly be some reason for so marked a shrinkage from affection, so strident an adhesion to violence, and although the matter can hardly be susceptible of logical proof, we can perhaps hazard two separate explanations.

The first would regard this new severity as a hard protective scab formed over a heart which had been cruelly lacerated by the death of his eldest son. It is common experience that after the death of a dearly loved person, grief sometimes causes the mourner to suppress his feelings, to harden his sensibility, to adopt an attitude of arrogant harshness in order to protect himself from further experiences which might wound or maul him. The loving and tender are replaced by the tough and the callous, for only on these terms can life be lived at all. If, then, we realize how deeply Jamini Roy had been affected by his son's death, we can understand why he needed to employ such harsh and ruthless forms.

This explanation, however, can hardly be the whole of the matter, for his son did not die until 1932, and by then his new style was already beginning to take form. In order, therefore, to understand its overriding air of grim severity, we are forced to examine another factor, to consider, in fact, once more the intense preoccupation of every sensitive Indian with political nationalism. We have seen that the nationalist movement was common to all parts of India. In Bengal, however, the demand for freedom was not only keener but had been accentuated by local developments. Bengal contained a higher number of Western-educated Indians than any other province, but a large proportion was discontented as a result either of complete unemployment or of employment in work unsuited to their qualifications. Until 1911 it was Calcutta, not New Delhi, which was the capital of the British Raj, and it was in 1906 that what had formerly been a vast and undivided Bengal was partitioned. The result was a fury of resentment and when many years later, in 1930, Edward Thompson wrote his sane and enlightened *The Reconstruction of India*, he included the following passage:

> 'Bengali Nationalism, unlike Nationalism in other parts of India, is not sprung from memory, but has an imaginative source. The enthusiastic intellectual Renaissance which resulted from the impact of the thought and literature of the West added to the flexibility and expressiveness of Bengali, one of the most vivacious and vivid tongues in the world. Poets and novelists evoked the Image of Bengal, the Mother watching over her children, the Land served by the Ganges and wonderful with wide, emerald fields, gracious mango-groves, far spreading silences and limpid skies. Of this the Administration realised nothing when it decided to split the province across. What to the Government was merely a measure designed for greater efficiency, to the Bengali mind was a deed of callous vivisection on a sacred body. If we are amazed that the protest was so bold and, indeed, seemingly insolent—a feature which struck India with astonishment and admiration—we should remind ourselves that the seamy side of the Imperial Government, whose capital was Calcutta, had been more familiar to the Bengalis than to any other race.'

Partition, then, quite as much as frustration due to unemployment, made the sense of struggle in Bengal overbearingly acute, and unlike other parts of India, where non-violence rapidly became a cardinal doctrine, Bengali nationalism took on a special character.

But a second and perhaps even more important reason was the enthusiasm of Bengalis for the goddess 'whose terrible form was Kali'. 'Kali worship,' Thompson explains, 'became Nation-worship,' adding that 'those resident in Bengal had reason enough to be conscious of this element of religious fanaticism.' And he recounts his personal experience.

> 'In the up-country city where I taught for many years, in 1920 a towering image of Kali, at least seventy feet high, was erected under a shelter, in a position where it commanded the main approach to the Bazaar. It stood for some years, and for all I know is standing still. In the very centre of the Bazaar, the vegetable market, appeared a thirty-foot high image of Vishnu in his Man-Lion incarnation, tearing out the bowels of a figure flung face upwards across his knees. The figure was pale-complexioned, and dressed like an Englishman. In front of the figure, and gazing reverently towards it, were Mr Gandhi and the Ali Brothers (to signify the Hindu-Mohammedan rapprochement), a woman ("Mother India"), and a cow. I have often seen the tableau,' he says, 'and I am glad I saw it.'

It is these two factors which explain the most significant aspect of Bengali nationalism, its cult of terrorism. 'Will the Bengali worshippers of Shakti (Kali) shrink from the shedding of blood?' declaimed a writer in the revolutionary newspaper *Yugantar*.

> 'The number of Englishmen in this country is not above one lakh and a half, and what is the number of English officials in each district? If you are firm in your resolution, you can, in a single day, bring British rule to an end. Lay down your life but first take a life. The worship of the goddess will not be consummated if you sacrifice your lives at the shrine of independence without shedding blood.'

These appeals resulted in a number of murders, and although the terrorist movement in Bengal varied greatly in intensity, one great outburst being followed by a lull and then the lull by a recrudescence—recourse to violence remained an essential element in Bengali politics.

It is this strand in national policy which we must bear in mind when considering the mature style of Jamini Roy. Four years after the Simon Commission began its work in 1927, signs of a harsh, severe strain appeared in his painting. The Viceroy's offer of dominion status within the Commonwealth was made (and rejected) in 1929—and between 1930 and 1935 terrorism was especially rife. But it is during these years that Jamini Roy's style moved farther and farther away from the paintings of Kalighat, with their great bounding curves, and based itself increasingly on the far more angular idioms of Bengali scroll paintings (Fig. 40). In the *Baul Group*[1] of 1931, for example, the figures are marked by a monumental gravity and an air of callous disdain, but the idioms for eyes and faces are still close to those of Kalighat. By 1934, on the other hand, these idioms have been discarded, and in his pictures of Santals dancing, drumming and making music (Figs. 34, 39, 41), the stress is everywhere on the vertical and the rigid. An idiom similar to that employed by Picasso (Fig. 33), but, in fact, in direct line with medieval Indian sculpture (Fig. 5), the miniature paintings of Central India (Fig. 18) and the village paintings of Bengal (Fig. 40) converts the nose and forehead into a single straight line. Faces are shown in profile and eyes are not only enlarged but are given the same kind of arrogant sharpness noticeable in an earlier style of Indian painting, that of the Jains. In each case the figures are

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[1] Bishnu Dey and John Irwin, *op. cit.*, pl. 4.

State Museum, LUCKNOW.

welded into a compulsive unity, but any direct connexion with natural appearances is wanting. *The Santal Couple* (Fig. 41) bear no relation to what Santals actually look like—the girl's hips have been diminished, her skirt is quite unlike the cloth which Santal girls wear, and the man has been provided with great towering legs. The nominal subject of Jamini Roy's picture is a Santal couple, but in the process of painting, it is as if Bengali exasperation has gripped him, infusing his style with precisely that quality of brusque defiance which in politics had come to be expressed by terrorism, the cult of violence, and the student's bomb.

Such an attitude was peculiarly suited to stressing moral qualities and when in 1937 Jamini Roy shed Santal subjects, he concentrated on a theme which was even more closely related to problems of independence and defiance—the career of Christ. Speaking much later, in 1943, he told Mary Milford:

> 'This is my latest period. I am not a Christian. I do not read the New Testament or any other writing but I meditate on what I have heard or what I know. There have been few, if any, satisfactory paintings of Christ for expression of the significance of his life. This is a great theme and I shall continue to struggle to find a fitting expression in modern terms.'

The style which he adopted had, at first sight, certain affinities with Byzantine painting, and it is possible that before embarking on this new subject he had examined books on Western art. In a similar way, during his previous period, he had probably fortified himself by studying, in reproduction, paintings by Picasso, while later in his career he did not hesitate to do virtuoso exercises in the manner of Van Gogh, Modigliani and even Amrita Sher-Gil. On the other hand, his own style was by now adult, and if there was, in fact, any study of Western prototypes, it is likely that they merely confirmed him in his own fully formed manner. And it is this which explains why, despite a new approach to the head and the endowment of the face with tragic dignity, the paintings of this period (Figs. 37, 38) are a continuation of his Santal studies. Christ was obviously regarded by him not as divine but rather as a person whose indifference to suffering, courage in the face of torment, simplicity, honesty and poverty exemplified the same virtues as those of Santals. Christ had also battled bravely against an alien system, and in that sense, despite his worship by the British, was a symbol of the fight for freedom. The titles of the pictures are different but the style and attitudes are so markedly the same that even in this period it is as if a Santal is still the leading theme. We meet, in fact, the same kind of transformation evident in pictures by the Australian artist, Sydney Nolan. Nolan was clearly fascinated by the career of Kelly, the bush-ranger, who defied the forces of conventional authority, but after he had illustrated many incidents in Kelly's struggle, he portrayed Christ in similar conditions. In these pictures Christ's identity is not in doubt, but so similar is the general context that it is as if the true subject of the pictures is unchanged. If, in Nolan's eyes, Christ is Kelly, for Jamini Roy, Christ is only another Santal.

Jamini Roy's Christ period proper lasted from 1937 to 1940, and during these years pictures such as *Christ with Disciples*,[1] *Christ with the Cross* (Fig. 38) and *Head of Christ* (Fig. 37) were painted. Many other pictures on Christian themes were also produced, and in fact their production continued long after the years we have just mentioned. In 1941, however, a brief new period began and, despite its apparent breach with Santal and Christian material, we can detect the same awareness of modern stresses, the same proud assertiveness, and, once again, a sympathy with those who would fearlessly resort to violence in order to salvage dignity and freedom. The pictures of this period may possibly have been suggested by certain paintings executed in 1938 and 1939 by Picasso, showing a cat carrying in its mouth a bird. At the same time, they also suggest a reversion to themes popularized by Kalighat painters during the nineteenth century. Besides portraying gods and goddesses, scenes of contemporary life and local scandals, they had also depicted animals—in particular a cat holding in its mouth a fish or a prawn (Fig. 43). This subject was supposedly satirical of Vaishnavite preachers who, sworn to practise the strictest vegetarianism, were prone to eat fish on the sly. What appeared to be an innocent cat holding a prawn was, therefore, in fact, an expression of popular indignation, a satire on religious hypocrisy. And it is these ideas which explain the pictures which Jamini Roy now produced. Taking as his subjects carnivorous animals such as a cat holding a fish, a fox, or a vixen (Fig. 44) or powerful massive creatures, such as elephants, he painted them with the same air of harsh brutality with which he had painted Santals. His style is once again the clue to an emotional attitude—an attitude in which two elements, repugnance at city life and repugnance at British rule, coalesce in arrogant defiance. At the same time, the subjects with their emphasis on violence hint at the role which sensitive patriots may well have wished to play. Just as the towering figure of Vishnu as Man-Lion mauling a prostrate Englishman had dominated Edward Thompson's up-country town, Jamini Roy's cat and vixen moving restlessly in quest of prey unconsciously symbolized the youth of Bengal longing to exterminate the hated foreigner. If, to this analysis, we add the artist's own dislike of Western manners and revulsion from Calcutta life, we can see how even in these paintings of animals he was still expressing his emotional reactions to the contemporary scene. 'Peace,' he told Mrs Milford, 'is not good for an artist. Art is born of experience, of stress and strain, wrestling with problems, intellectual and physical,' and in these pictures the lack of peace explains the artistic power.

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[1] Bishnu Dey and John Irwin, *op. cit.*, pl. 11.

Pictures of this kind were painted during World War II, and although they express Jamini Roy's own style, the arrival of foreign troops brought to a head a problem which had exercised his mind for several years—the proper place of art in society. From the late nineteen-thirties he had been obsessed with the fate of art in Bengal. Bazaar painting at Kalighat had ended in 1930, killed by the competition of German and Japanese prints. The professional artist appeared to have no outlet and of all the houses in Calcutta scarcely any possessed pictures which were painted by hand. If art was once again to find a market or a public, two conditions must be satisfied. Pictures must be cheap and there must be enough of them to make a public impression. It was obviously impossible for one artist, working alone, to fulfil so important a function, and Jamini Roy fell back on a method which he believed was in strict accord with Indian practice. The *patuas* of Kalighat and of his native Bankura had always regarded picture-making as a collective function. Particular masters might invent the original design but this was always imitated by juniors or assistants, and in this way many copies of the same picture were continually produced. It was by these methods that the bazaar artists of Kalighat had supplied a huge pilgrim market. Even outside Bengal, in the sphere of Rajput court painting, several hands had often contributed to the same work, and it was equally normal for several, even many, 'issues' of particular sets of pictures to be produced. Such a view-point was not unreasonable. Yet due to contacts with the West the situation had undergone one major change. Artists were no longer supposed to leave their work unsigned, and, if they signed it, Western patrons, at any rate, tended to believe it was their own unaided work. Jamini Roy could hardly abandon this practice without ceasing to be a modern artist, yet, if he was to put his ideas into practice, he would obviously have to sponsor pictures which might well include the work of other painters. He was confronted, in fact, with a dilemma; and his solution, although hardly comforting to Western patrons, reflects his essentially simple, even naïve, mind. Holding that his objective was a popular Bengali market and that, according to Bengali standards, his name was quite irrelevant, he established a studio of assistants but instead of omitting his signature used it as a kind of trademark. He himself might not execute a picture, but the salient idea, the subject and arrangement of forms, the detailed stylistic idioms, were his and his alone. If undiluted work was required, the patron himself must distinguish it. It was the painting, not the signature, which mattered. And it is this which brings us to the crux of the problem.

When we examine Jamini Roy's career as a modern artist, we are confronted with an ironical situation. Despite the low prices of his pictures, despite, too, their vital relevance to some of the most acute problems of modern Bengali society, it was, in the main, not Bengalis who bought his pictures but either British residents in Calcutta, other members of the cosmopolitan community or Indians with a Western outlook. It was the style, rather than its implications, which excited their interest, the idioms with their modern parallels arousing an acute nostalgia for Paris and Picasso. Unaware of their true significance as something vitally Bengali, the pictures in some strange fashion buttressed the modern Englishman's view of painting, impressing him more as subtle exercises in 'abstract art' than as vital expressions of an anguished age. 'The lonely search for form,' two writers have said, 'became for Jamini Roy a great intellectual adventure.' And it is this circumstance which explains what might otherwise seem so perplexing—that it was members of the hated Raj rather than Indian patriots who enabled him to put into practice his cherished theories. With the outbreak of World War II, British soldiers crowded into Calcutta and, encouraged by the enlightened example of Mrs Casey, the wife of the Governor, many of them interested themselves in his work. The demand for his pictures suddenly expanded, but it was a British not a Bengali demand. We have only, in fact, to consult the Bengali newspaper, the *Anand Bazaar Patrika*, to see how certain Bengalis derided his achievement, refusing to recognize how profoundly linked to their own emotional stresses was the work of this patient and humble man. So sudden a demand may well have mystified Jamini Roy, leading him to suppose that at last he was in a position to inoculate Bengali city houses with form and colour. It may even be questioned whether he fully realized what, in fact, was happening. He may simply have been aware that not only were his pictures selling but selling well, and that this was the moment to put into effect his theories. His studio was therefore expanded and 'Jamini Roys' poured out of it. In formulating his programme, however, he had either forgotten or ignored one cardinal principle. As is only too well known in the West, the work of an artist's studio is almost always deficient in elements vital to the master himself. The copy never equals the original. In becoming a 'factory', therefore, he was unconsciously lowering his own standards and as an indirect consequence was resorting to practices which ill became his previous habits. He abandoned the mineral and vegetable colours which he had formerly collected with slow and anxious care. He now used ready-made paints with flat and lurid hues. He simplified designs, often reducing the figures almost to diagrams. And, in the upshot, he produced an art appropriate to a workshop. The result was what we might expect—a sudden deterioration in style and sensibility. Between 1940 and 1945 only a small proportion of the pictures which emanated from his studio had the nerved originality of his major work or its subtle exploration of form and colour. Only a proportion retained his private touch, and even pictures which were, in fact, his own betrayed a coarsening of inspiration, a loss of expressiveness, a lack of certainty. The artist had become a business man, and in so doing had half committed suicide.

The word 'half' is used advisedly, for in recent years there are signs that a vital and original artist has once again emerged. This is not the place to discuss his latest work; but just as the sudden influx of British patrons contributed to the destruction of his art, their exit at the end of the war helped to revive it. The demand for his pictures slumped. Visitors to his 'factory' became rarer, and although he continued to employ assistants he was driven back on his own resources. Of the pictures painted by him since 1945, one in particular, a study of two cats sharing a prawn (Fig. 45), reproduced in colour in Ajit Mookerjee's *Modern Art in India*, reveals with what masterly assurance he has since renewed an early theme. The picture was painted in about 1950 when he was already sixty-three, but it abundantly confirms the judgement that, stimulated by the rediscovery of village styles of Indian painting with their unconscious approximation to modern art, a painter from Bengal could evolve a style which exactly expressed some of the most vital urges in modern India.

VII

Art and Romance

GEORGE KEYT

JAMINI ROY was a product of Bengal, a part of India which has always had a distinctive culture of its own. We must now consider an artist whose birthplace is outside India but whose work is deeply connected with it. The artist is George Keyt and the country in question Ceylon. Keyt's work was unknown in India until 1946, but in that year the art magazine *Marg* was founded in Bombay, and at once it became evident that a new and vital personality had entered modern Indian art.

This incursion from Ceylon need not unduly surprise us. From very early days Ceylon has been an integral part of the Indian sub-continent—as vitally 'Indian' as the Punjab in the north, the Malabar coast in the west and Andhra in the south. The straits of Comorin which separate it from the mainland are in this respect as insignificant as the English Channel, and just as Britain cannot be envisaged without Europe, it would be impossible to imagine Ceylon without India. Indeed so close is this natural tie that the greatest of Indian art historians and critics, the Ceylonese writer, Ananda Coomaraswamy, has strongly affirmed it. Writing of *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, he says:

'The arts can only be saved in the long run by the people themselves. [And he asks] How are the people to be saved? How shall they be re-energised and re-inspired, how become once more socially constructive, how learn to re-express the national emotion in literature and art? The answer is by love of India. There is scarcely any part of Sinhalese life, or religion, or art, which is quite comprehensible without reference to India; the Sinhalese themselves are Indians; the greatness of their civilisation dates from the wave of Indian influences that reached Ceylon through Asoka's missionaries; the air and soil in which the nation has grown and borne good fruit are Indian; how should another soil and atmosphere be suited to it now? India without Ceylon is incomplete, for in many ways Ceylon is a more perfect window through which to gaze on India's past, than any that can be found in India herself. Much more is Ceylon incomplete if alienated from the Motherland. The most remarkable and significant of the awakenings to national self-consciousness which have taken place in modern times, is the recognition by the people of India of their fundamental unity. Of this unity, Ceylon is economically, mentally and spiritually, a part; and with its culture and life, must her own survive or perish.'

And he states with a clarity and courage that must surely silence even the most brash of chauvinists, 'Sinhalese art is essentially Indian.' 'The true impulse to a wider and fuller life must come once more, as in Ceylon it has always come, from India.'

It is this realization which perhaps explains why the journal *Marg*, in the second of its numbers, reproduced one of Keyt's most famous paintings, *Prema* (Fig. 57), and included in its third issue a detailed survey of his work. Keyt, in the judgement of its editor, could not be dismissed as a mere resident of an alien island. He was essentially Indian in spirit, attitude and culture, and as such was entitled to be termed a modern Indian artist. And it is this viewpoint which explains his inclusion in the present book.

Keyt was born in 1901, a member of what is known in Ceylon as a Burgher family. In other words, certain of his ancestors must, at some time, have been Dutch, while the rest of his family has been Ceylonese. The Dutch entered Ceylon in the seventeenth century and, from then onwards until the eighteenth century, mingled with the local people, resulting in what we can only call a new caste. This caste was not at all alien to the island, and up to the present day the Burgher community has been not only proudly Ceylonese but a vital part of the Ceylonese nation. Keyt himself was educated at Trinity College, Kandy, where he acquired a fluent knowledge of English and spent part of his leisure time in drawing and painting. He did not, however, enter an art school until 1927, and it is this late adhesion to art, this prolonged postponement of technical training, which perhaps accounts for the maturity of his work. During these years he was not so much an artist as a poet—one who was as keen to absorb the standards and values of ancient Indian poetry as to discover his own ideals of physical form. And we can see how basic was this private education in poetry from the close connexion which exists between his ideas of feminine physique and the type of beauty extolled by the Sanskrit poet, Kalidasa.

'In the hot breathless summer, the veils drop one by one, from the masses of dark hair, from the moving shoulders, the breasts and thighs which were entangled, and now women's garments are mingled with fresh jasmine . . . their haunches are held in gold.

'During the rains, the girls make themselves ready to be desirable with mastic upon their mouths. They brighten their ears with coloured blossoms, they set new pearls upon their nipples and let fall their hair . . . a white garment strains their haunches in pleasant and irresistible shades at their dividing, a God-like attraction.

'In the season of dews, a feeling of ease comes over the body. Women make ready to celebrate the time of dews; they circle their breasts with chosen tissue. They mould their haunches in coloured silk and load their hair with blossoms of red mango.

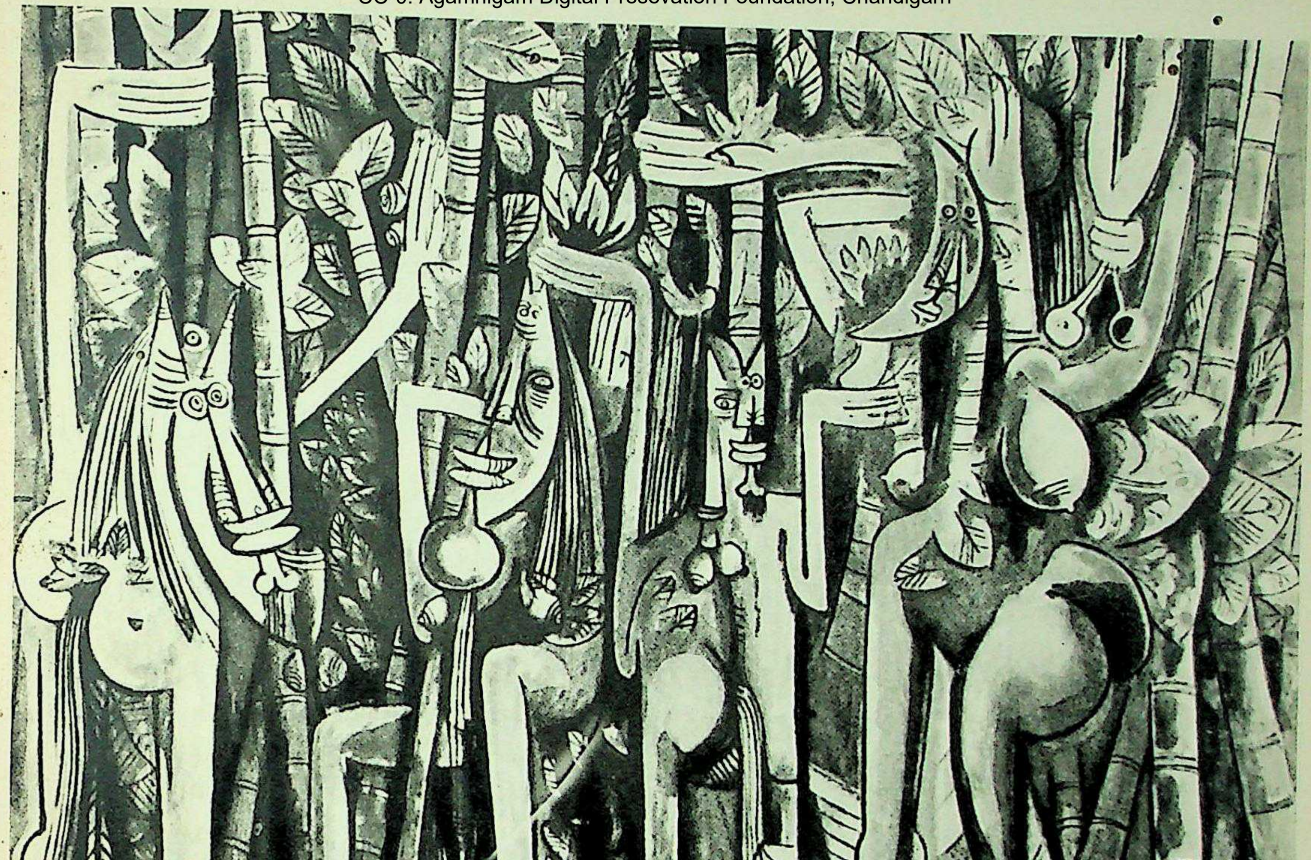
'Spring comes and feasts the heart: Life is in all things: pearls shake upon high breasts and perfumed breath is shaken. Girdles are troubled about the flanks of women. Tissues gilt with the sap of saffron lie upon breasts and haunches fill with silk, dyed with kushuma; this is the vaulting time of love.'

These paragraphs communicate the almost delirious delight with which Kalidasa regarded women, but they do much more—they express the bodily ideals, the exact physical characteristics, which were later to play so moving a role in Keyt's own pictures.

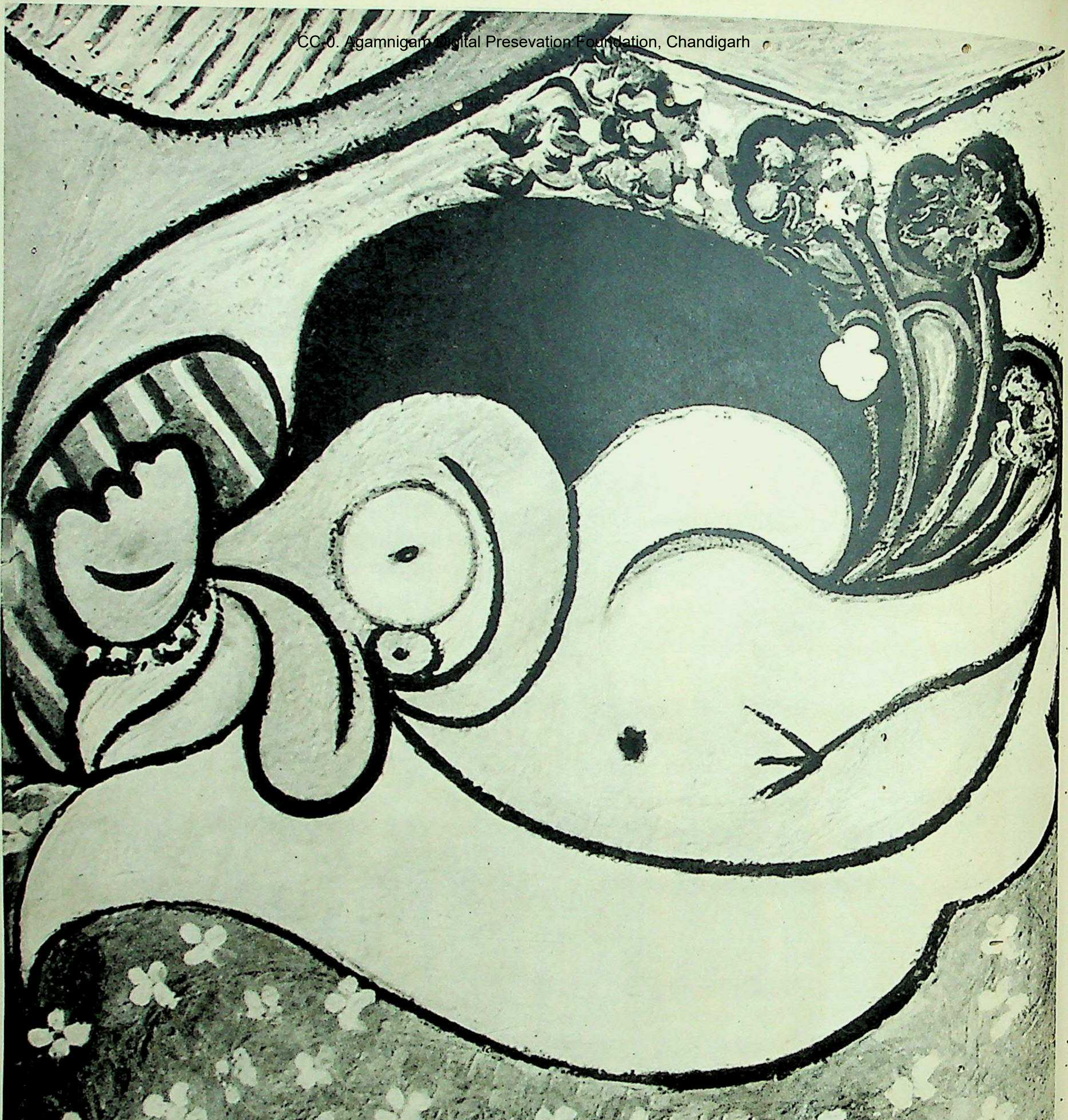
To delight in women and to be a poet—these were important qualifications. But they were hardly enough to make Keyt an artist, and we must now consider the stages by which the poet became the painter. His first attempts at drawing were experimental. We learn from his friend, Martin Russell, that from early boyhood he enjoyed sketching, and that while serving as a volunteer in the Buddhist national movement, he made illustrations for Buddhist themes. He also worked for firms of photographers. Yet although compelled to undertake such drab and banal work, Keyt was obviously a quite exceptional personality and when, at last, he submitted to artistic instruction it was in a form that was unofficial. He did not enter the Government School of Art—a school committed, as Martin Russell has said, to 'indescribably mediocre strivings towards the Victorian and Edwardian levels of European naturalism', or, in Dr Paul Pieris's words, 'the futile imitation of the unessential characteristics of the cheapest style of representation in western art'. He joined rather the Ceylon Art Club—a club which owed much of its vitality to the over-maligned C. F. Winzer, the Ceylon Government's Inspector of Art. Winzer was to Ceylon what Havell had been to Bengal, and while his ideals were open to the same very drastic objections as Havell's, his words are strangely in line with those of the first great pioneer of modern Indian painting. After stressing the need for preserving Ceylonese culture, Winzer said:

> 'Our materials are different, our conditions are different, the demands of the public are different, and the public must be trained and enlightened by us sufficiently, not only to appreciate our work, but also that of the past: which is appreciated actually as are relics, as signs of past greatness but not out of time, as works of art. But in spite of all the differences of time, of condition, of presentment, the eternal qualities of art, as shown at Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, should be studied, adapted to our life, and a continuity with them achieved. I may add that this continuity is closer to the decorative conceptions of modern art than to the realistic, true-to-life prettiness and cheap harmonies of academic achievement.'

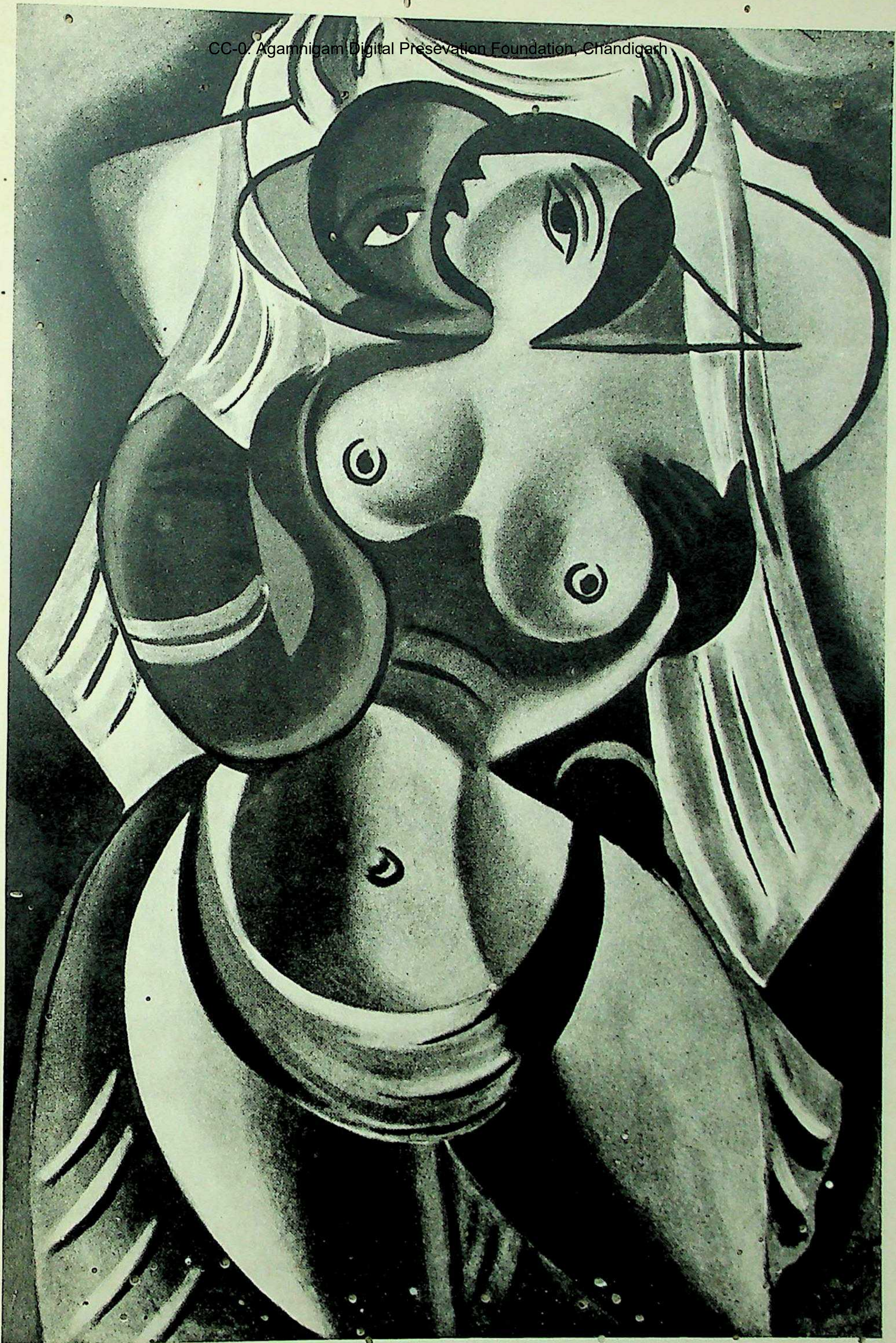
The problems of a young Ceylonese artist in 1927 were, in fact, no different from those confronting modern artists in India much earlier in the century, and although the comparison may at first sight seem a little far-fetched, we can best sympathize with Keyt's particular problems by considering for a moment the situation of another modern artist, Wifredo Lam, in the island of Cuba. The West Indies, Pierre Loeb has said, is a cluster of islands, the cross-roads of two continents, 'where the tom-toms can still be heard feebly beating, where all the atavisms are still alive and where blood is more mixed than anywhere else'. Lam is a Negro with Chinese blood. He is also a man of great intelligence, and while he could realize that the artistic forms devised by generations of Negro sculptors corresponded to something inexpressibly deep and intimate in the Negro view of life, his awareness of the modern world compelled him to realize that Negro art, even in its provincial Cuban setting, had reached a dead end. Yet Lam was inescapably Negro, and there thus arose the same kind of problem as was evident in the work of other modern artists. Part of the old tradition must at all costs be salvaged since, without it, the vital sense of national integrity would be lost. On the other hand, the beliefs, ceremonies and rituals preserved with such anxious care by his forefathers and expressed in the styles and mannerisms of Negro art were no longer in accord with modern life. The art itself was Negro—to that extent it was still a vehicle for Negro expression—but the social and religious occasions which brought it into being were no longer compatible with intelligent living. To be a Negro artist in Cuba, therefore, Lam could neither continue producing objects which his knowledge of the modern world rejected, nor could he jettison all the feelings and emotions which his ancestors had slowly developed and which had led to certain styles. The solution to his difficulties was provided by contact with work by Picasso. Picasso was specially relevant since, in 1907, he had himself responded to Negro art-forms, finding in masks of the French Congo the exact artistic idioms needed for expressing his attitude to modern life. The result is seen in pictures which are conveniently called his 'Negro' period, of which the greatest and most telling masterpiece is *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. In this picture a group of prostitutes await their sailor clients. The shapes are totally devoid of sensuous appeal and the faces which are influenced by Negro masks express a sinister blankness, a harsh indifference to any kind of love. Forms, in fact, which in their original Negro settings were designed to scare evil spirits or enhance the morale of local sorcerers were used by Picasso for private emotional ends. There was no deliberate copying or pastiche. There was not the slightest attempt to do for Negroes what Negroes no longer did. There was rather a subtle injection of Negro styles with Picasso's own methods or, to put it the other way round, there was a subtle use of Negro inventions for Picasso's own needs. Such work was modern in every way and, although the phase itself did not last for more than three years, it served as prelude to a number of other periods in all of which the main mode of expression tended to include an element of savage simplification, of wild and brusque distortion and geometric harshness. Such styles had nothing to do with the stale or the academic. Picasso's reactions were to life as it then was, and even when boldly utilizing previous forms he was daringly original



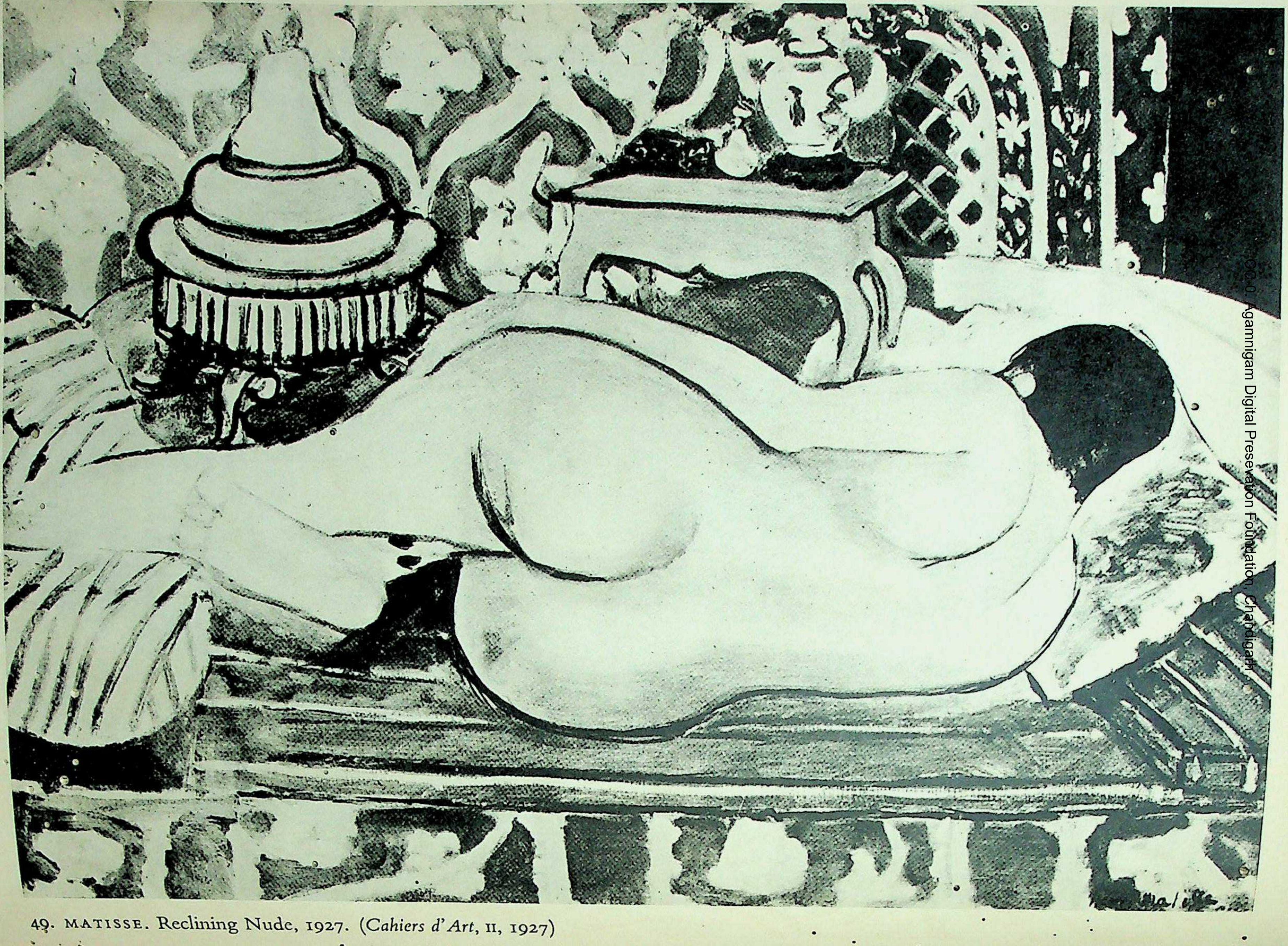
46. WIFREDO LAM. The Jungle. Museum of Modern Art, New York



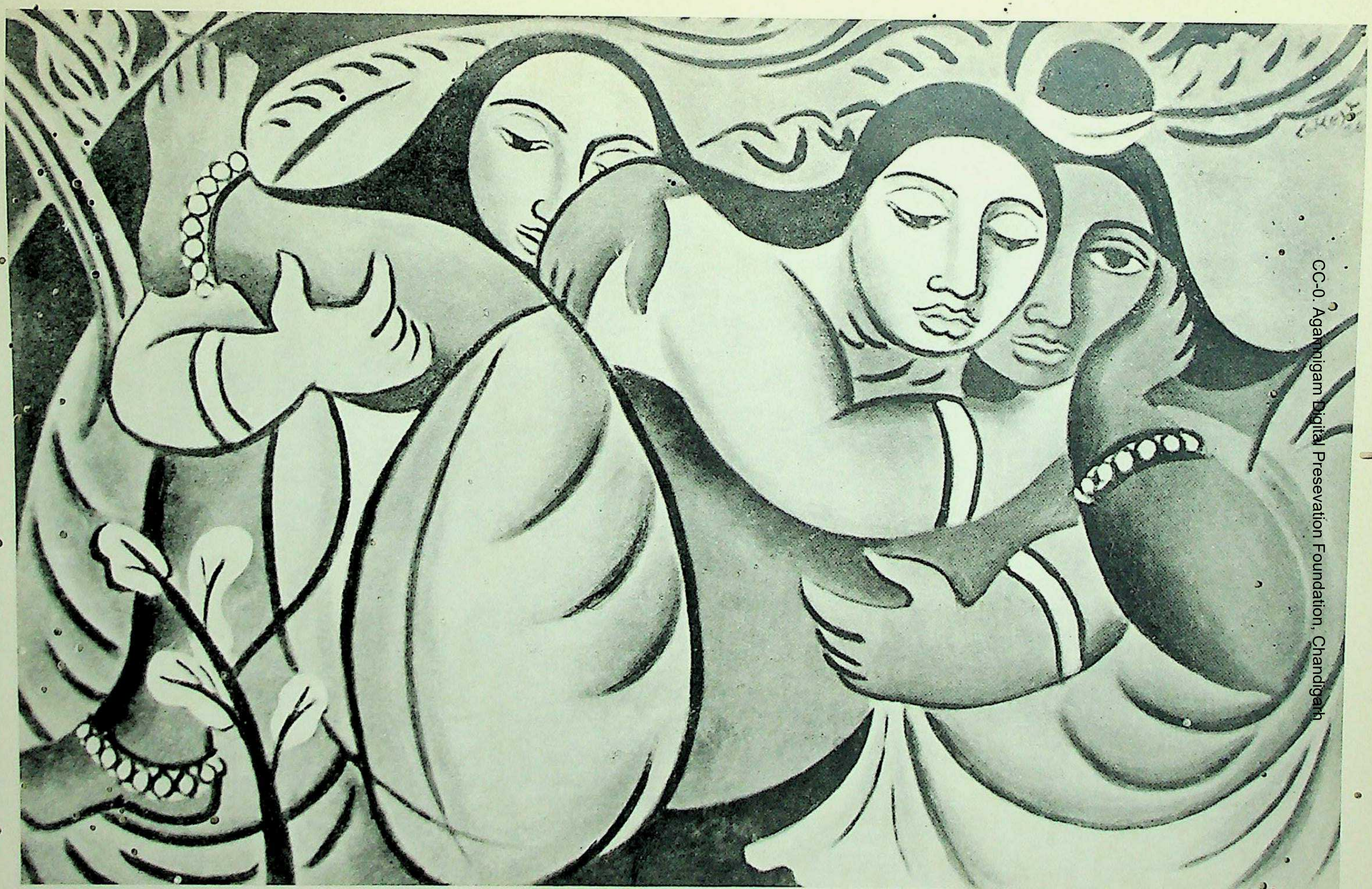
47. PICASSO. Woman with Flowers, 1932. (*Cahiers d'Art*, x, 1935)



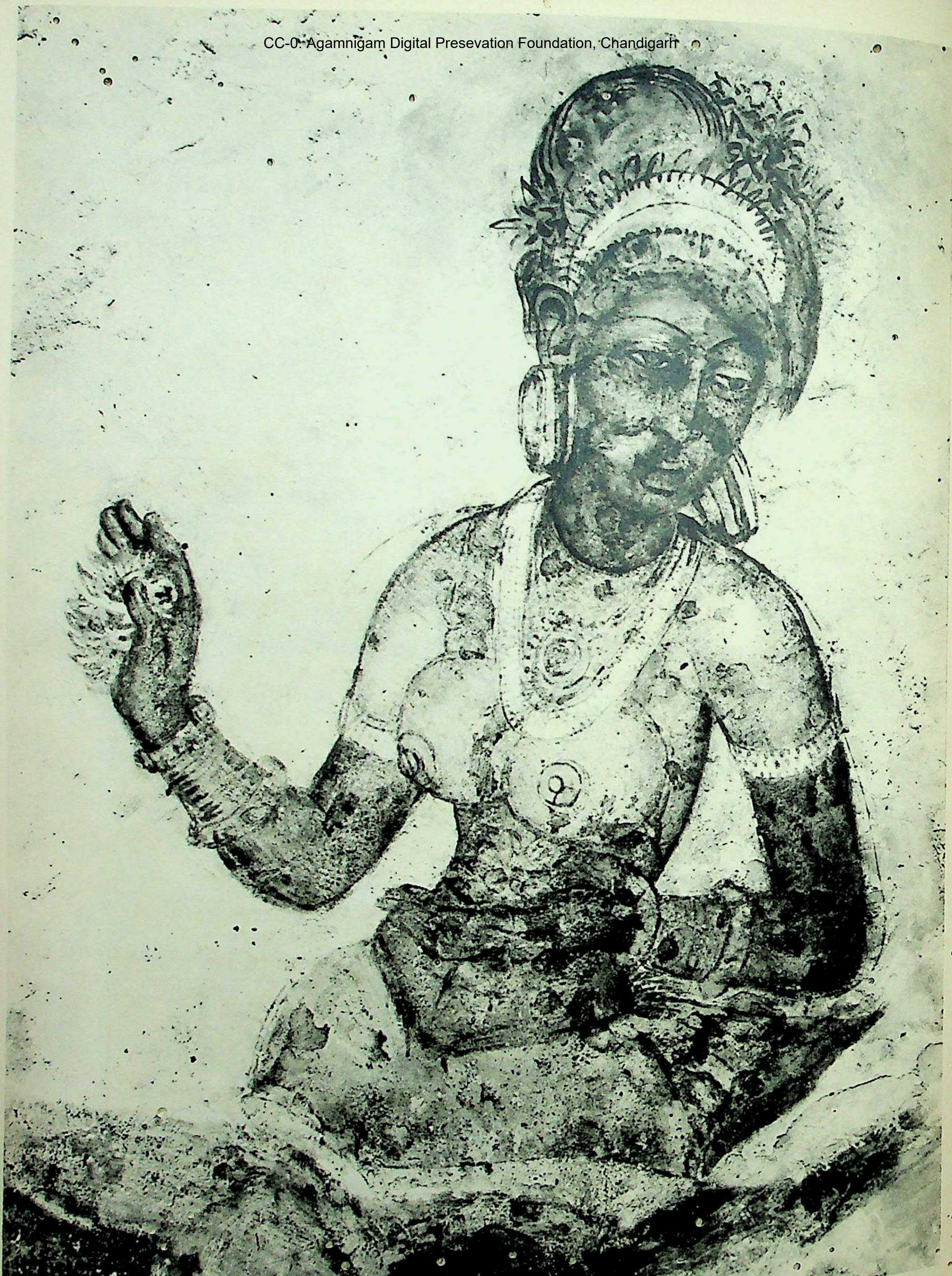
48. GEORGE KEYT. Varsha Vihara, 1937. Lionel Wendt Memorial, Colombo



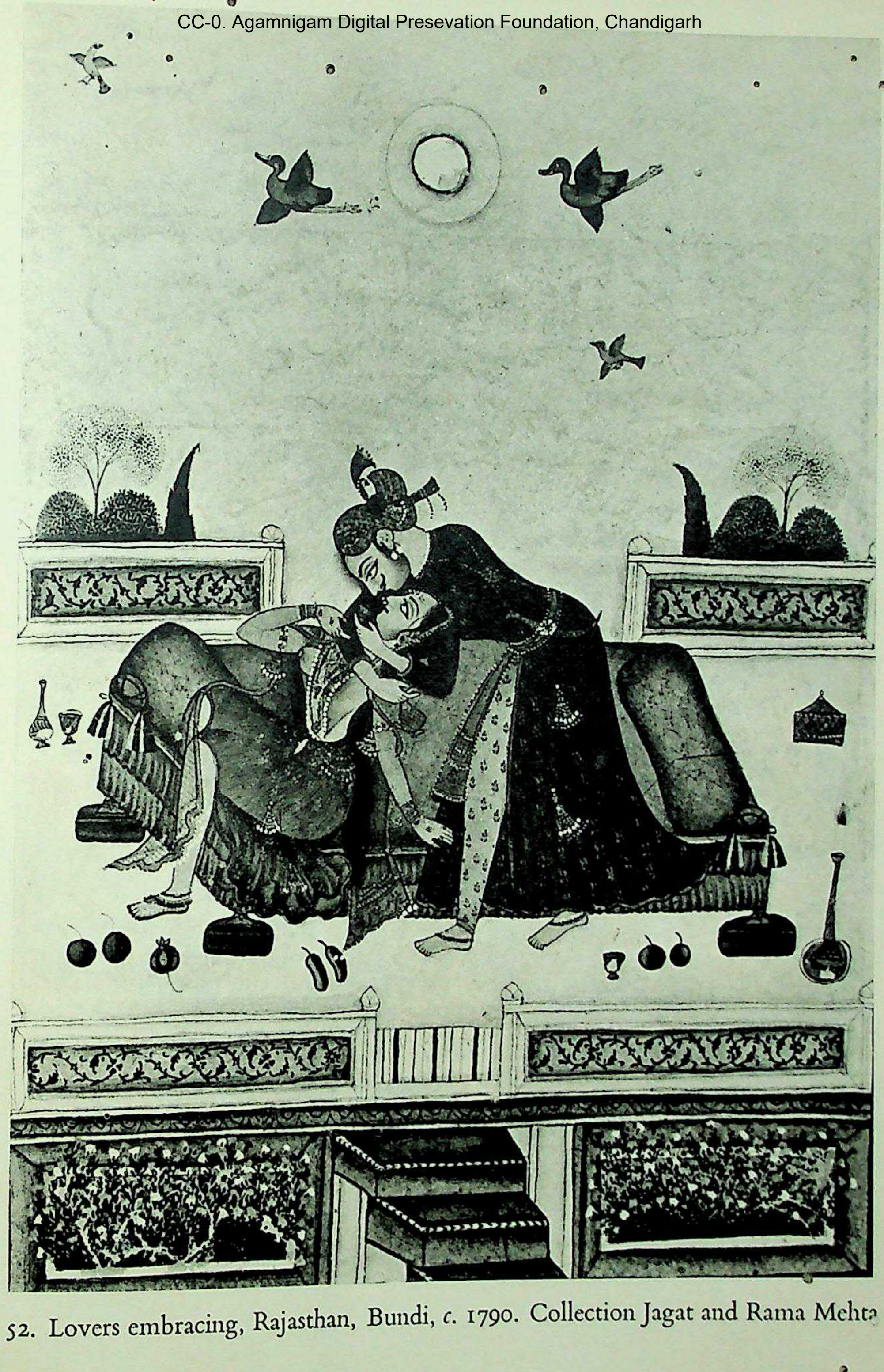
49. MATISSE. Reclining Nude, 1927. (*Cahiers d'Art*, II, 1927)



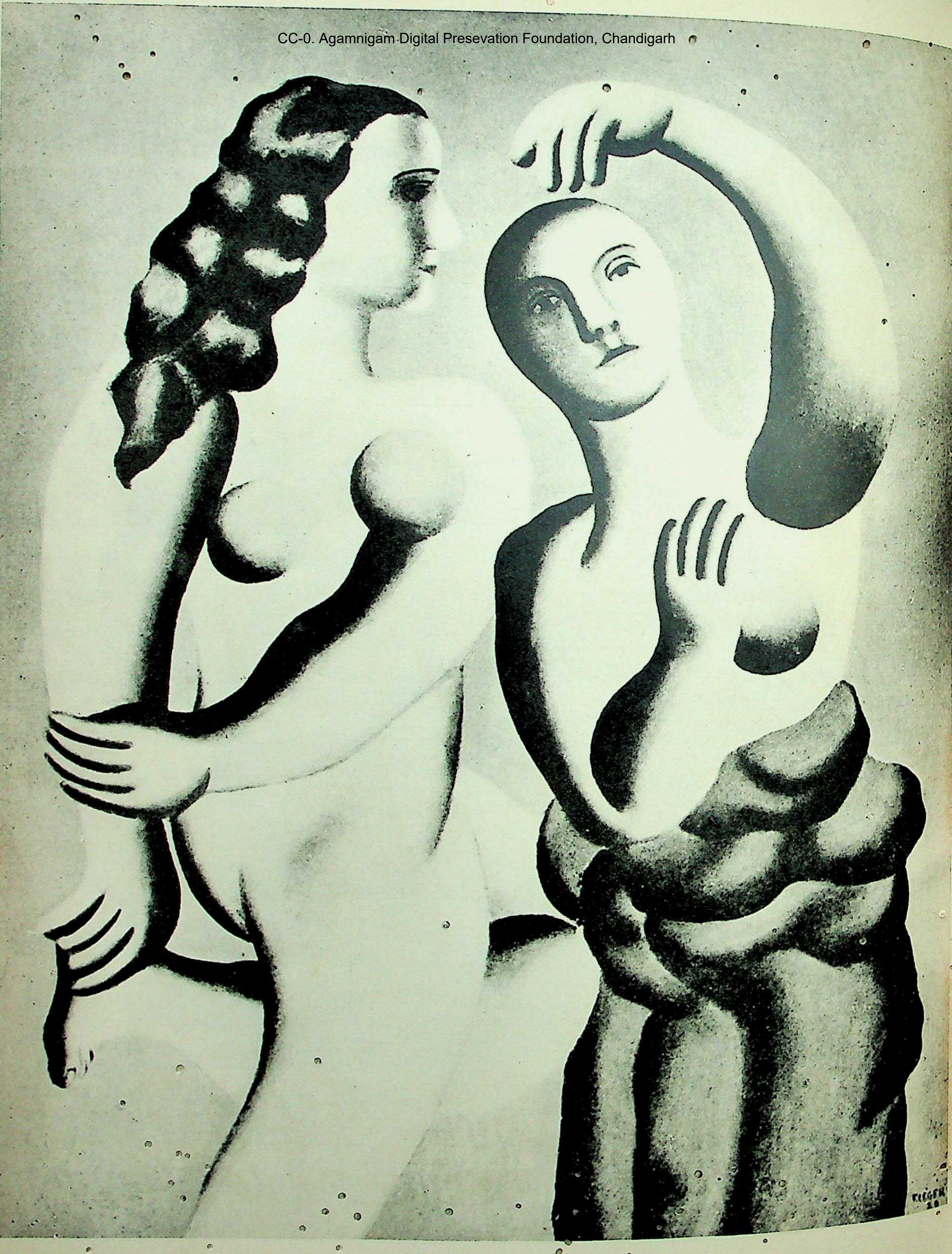
30. GEORGE KEYT. Radha and Krishna, 1936. Lionel Wendt Memorial, Colombo



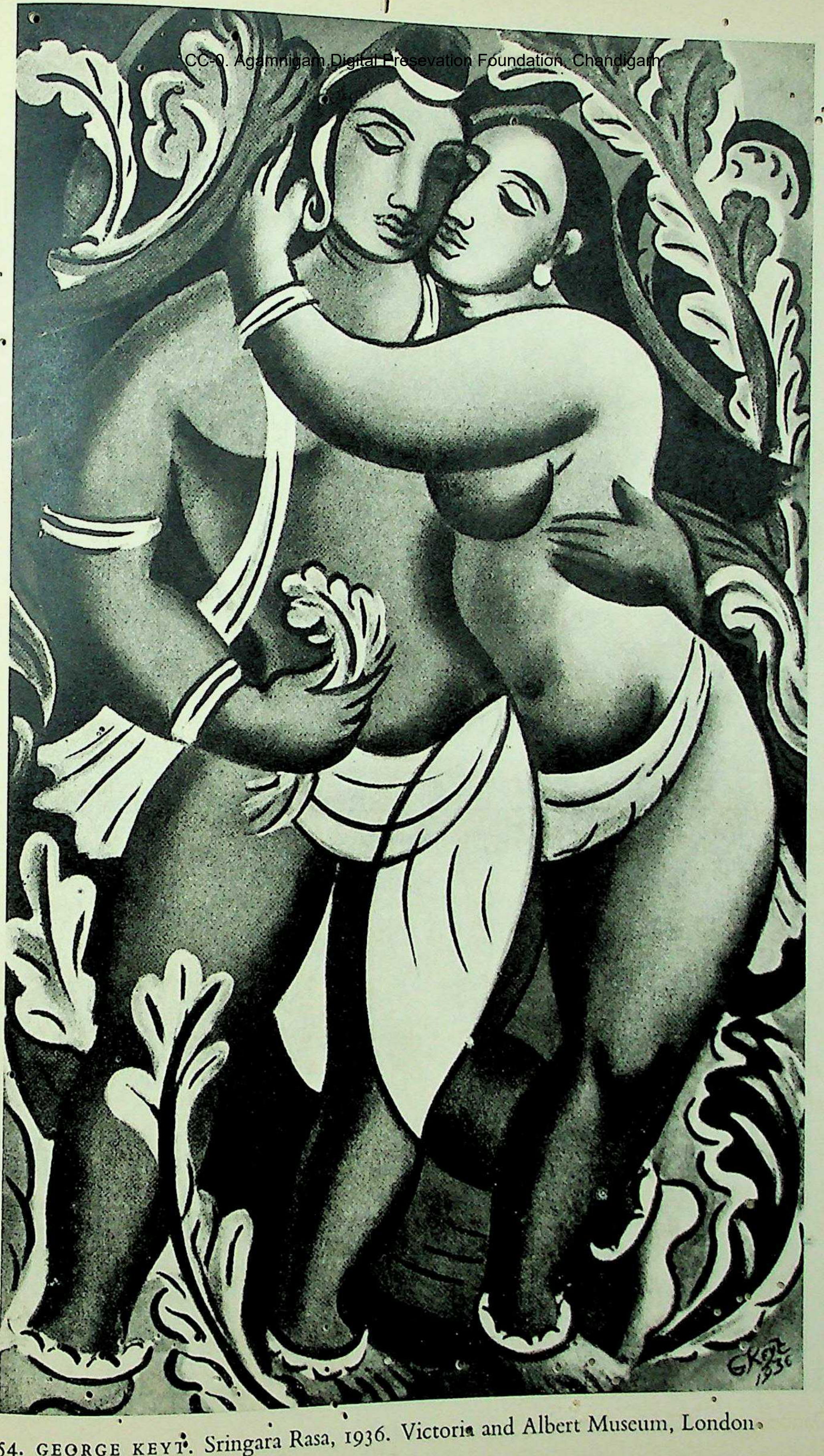
51. Woman with flowers. Rock-painting, Sigiri, Ceylon. Fifth century A.D.



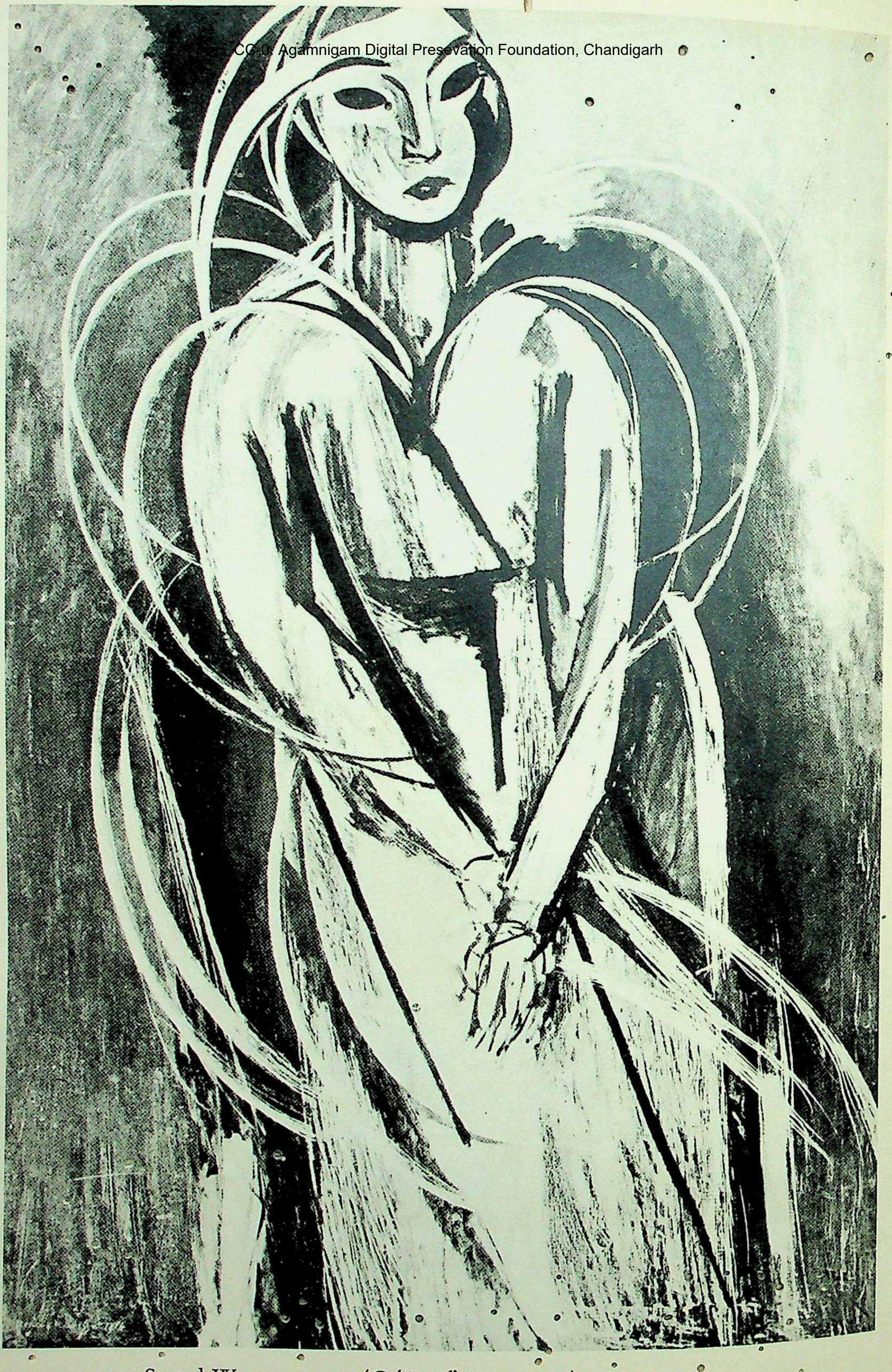
52. Lovers embracing, Rajasthan, Bundi, *c.* 1790. Collection Jagat and Rama Mehta



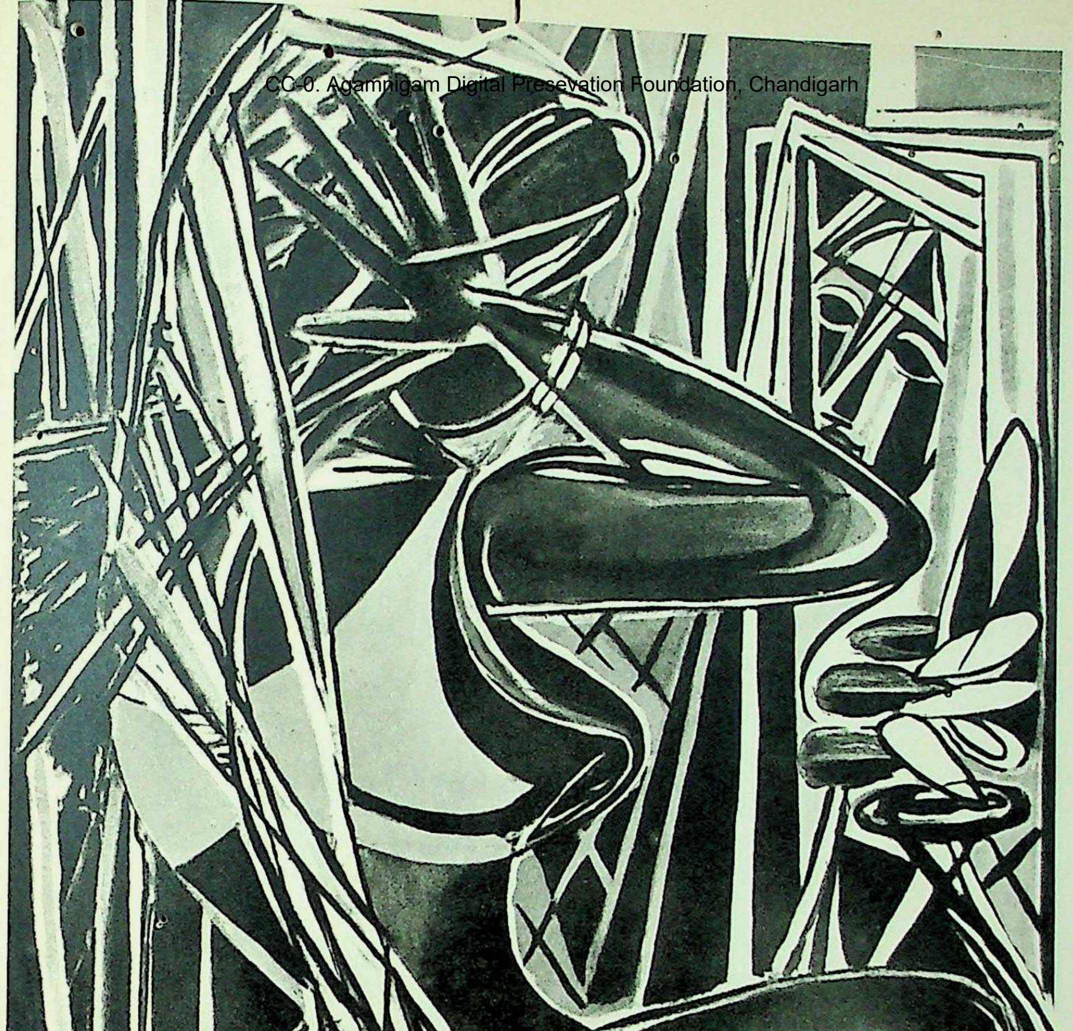
53. LÉGER. Dancers, 1929 (*Cahiers d'Art*, VII, 1933)



54. GEORGE KEYT. Sringara Rasa, 1936. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



55. MATISSE. Seated Woman, 1912. (*Cahiers d'Art*, II, 1927)



56. GEORGE KEYT. The Toilet, 1944. Collection Martin Russell

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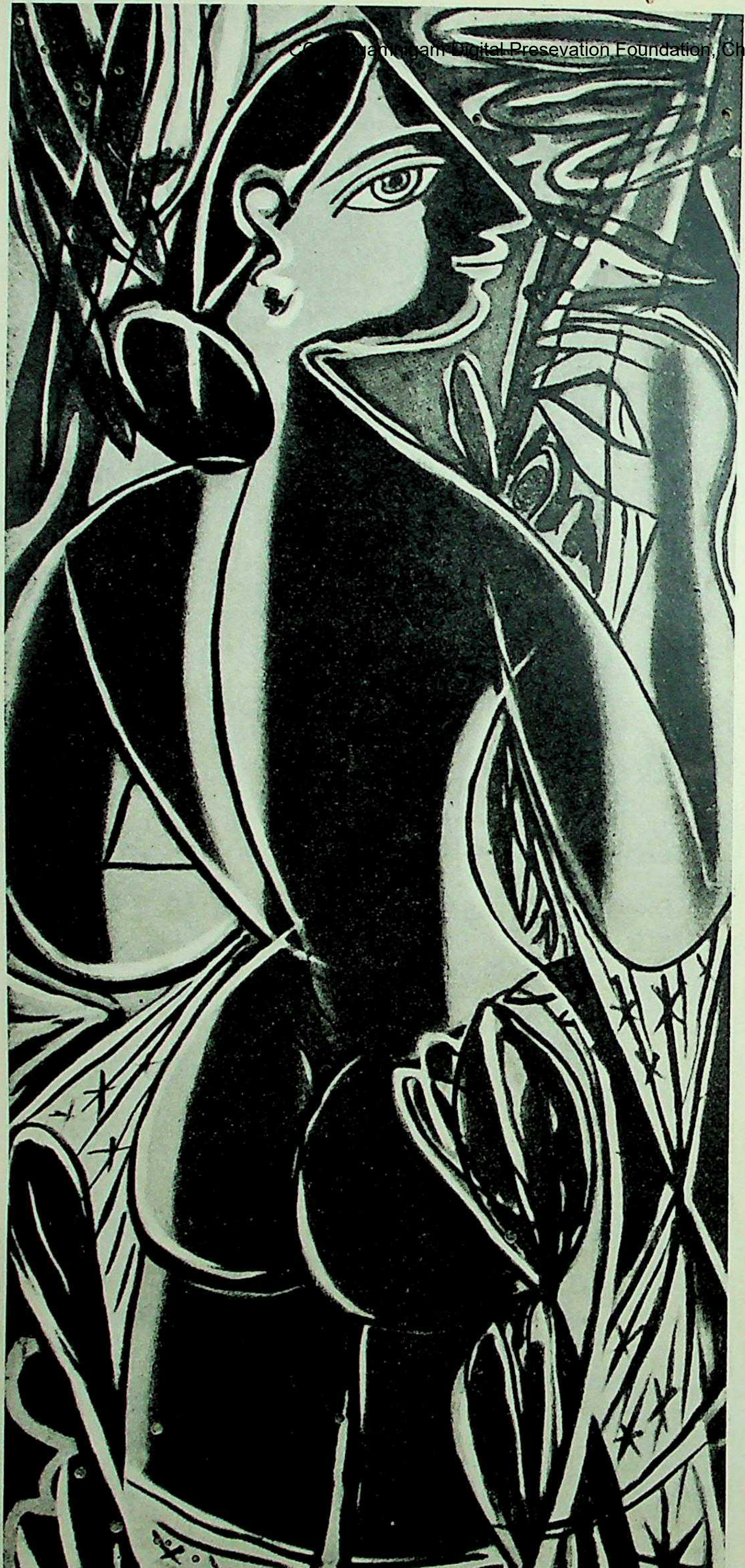
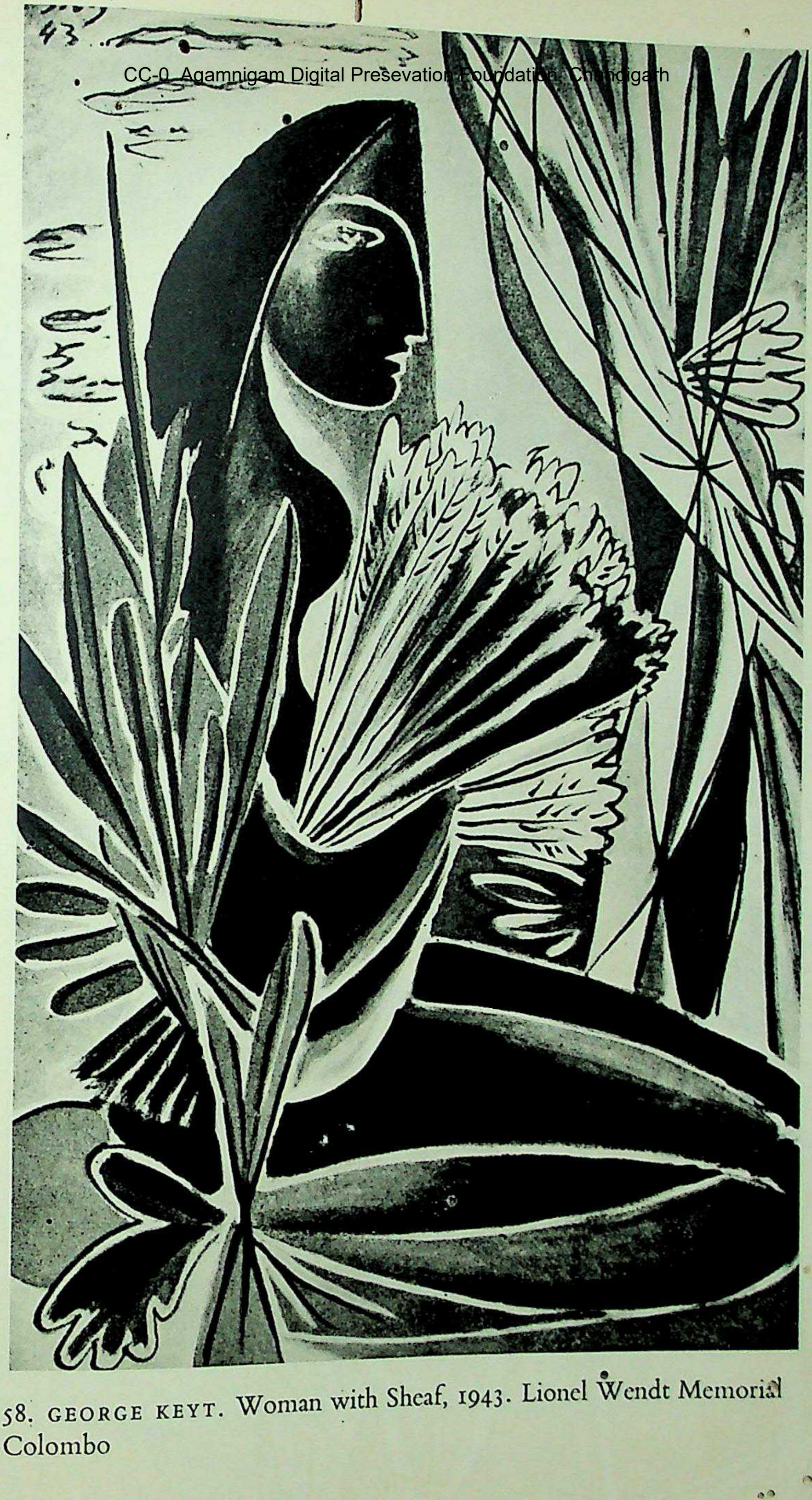
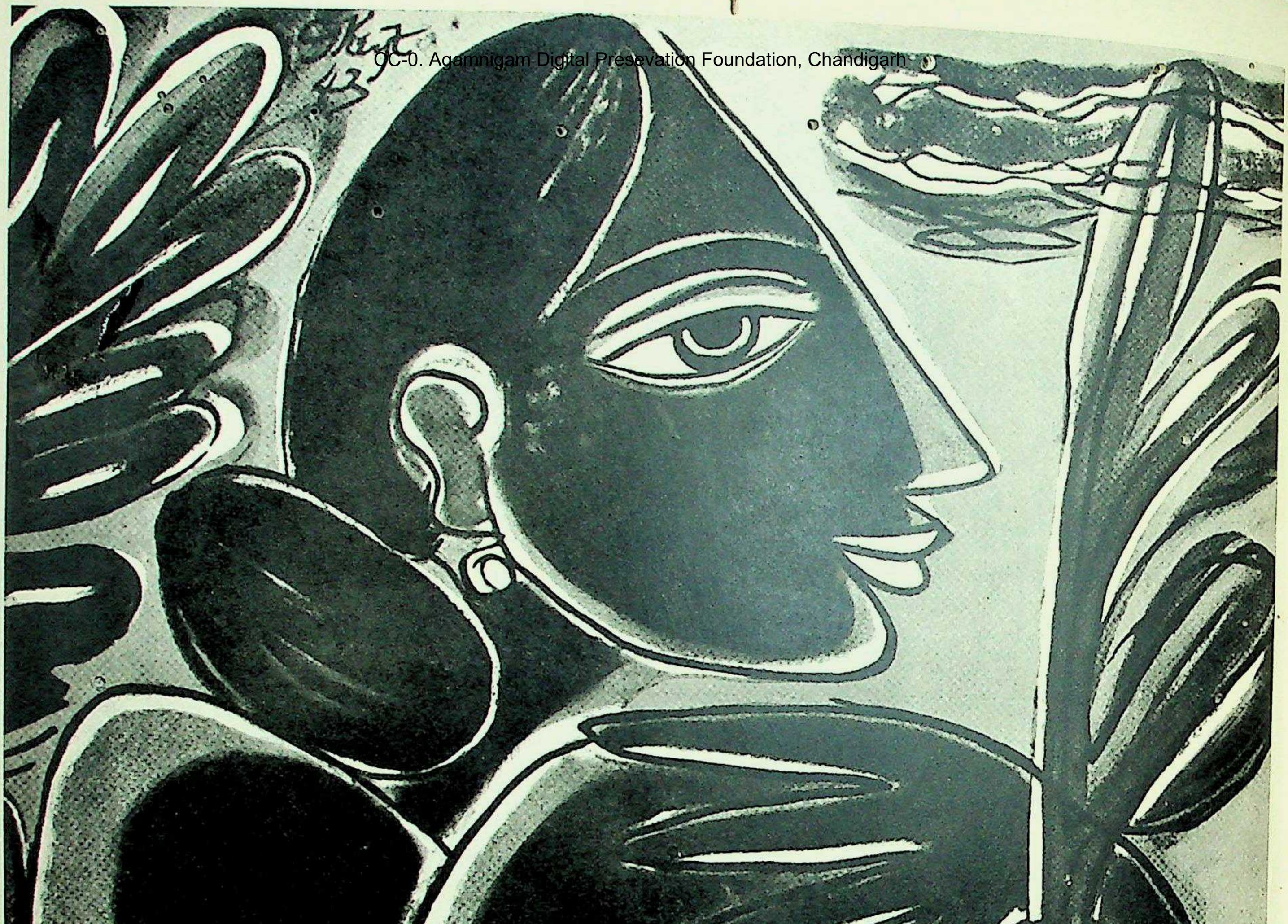


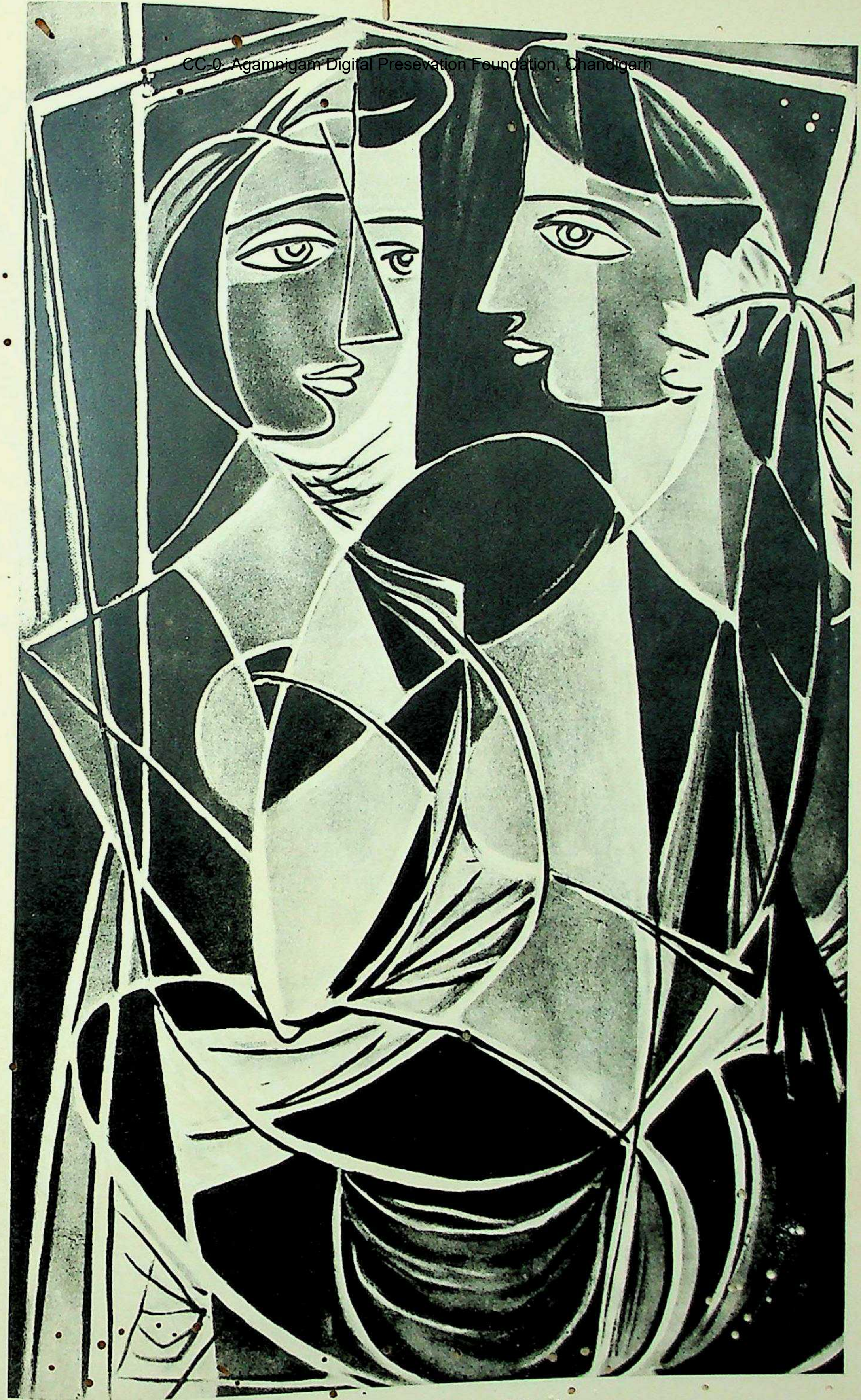
57. GEORGE KEYT. Prema, *c.* 1943
Collection Hilda Naidoo



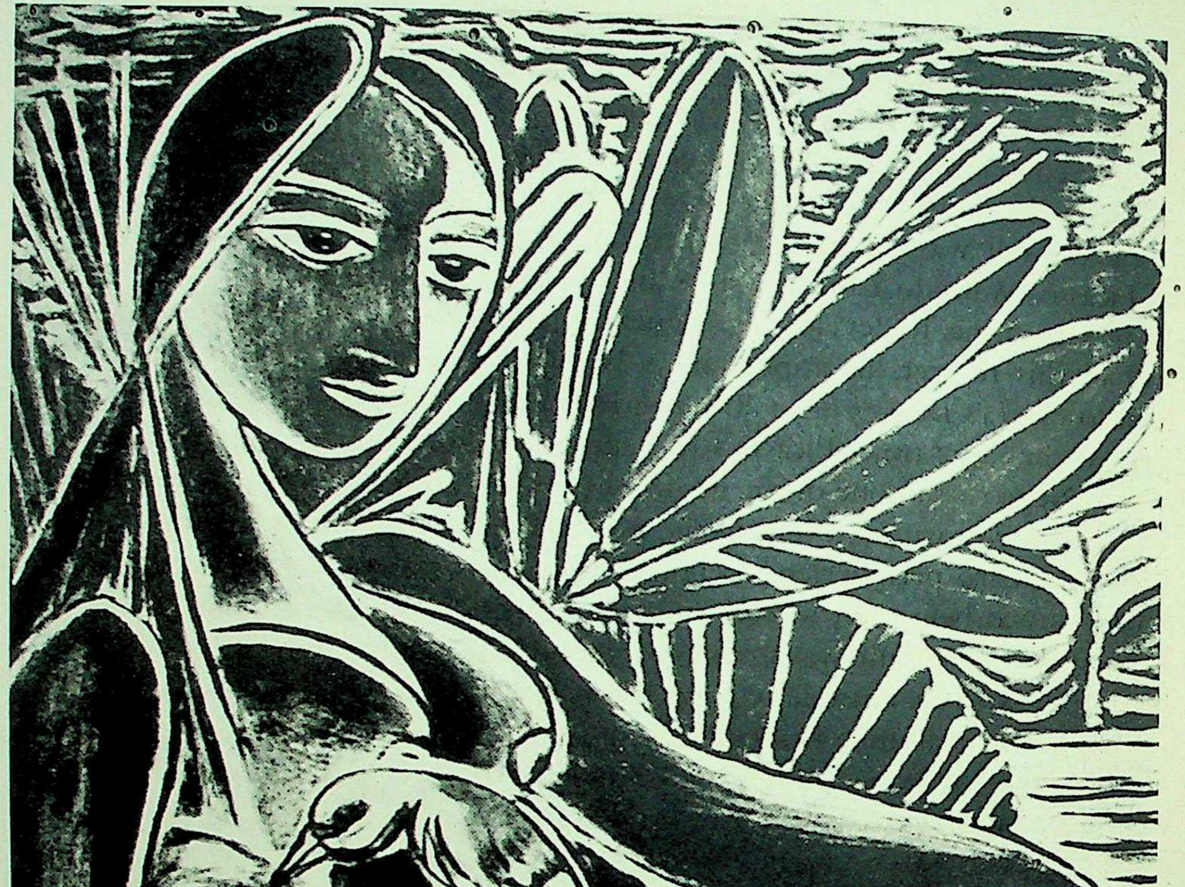
58. GEORGE KEYT. Woman with Sheaf, 1943. Lionel Wendt Memorial Colombo



59. GEORGE KEYT. Nayika, 1943. Lionel Wendt Memorial, Colombo



60. GEORGE KEYT. Sringar, 1947. Collection Rasna Mistri



61. GEORGE KEYT. Woman with Bird, 1944. Collection Roland Penrose

in his transformations. As such, by 1930, he had already been acclaimed the greatest modern artist. And it was unthinkable that a young Cuban painter, acutely conscious of his Negro ancestry yet determined to be both modern and himself, should not discover in Picasso a source of new vitality.

The result was a series of paintings in which under the indirect influence of Picasso, Wifredo Lam began to discover his own inner consciousness and, at the same time, to develop an original style. He was a painter, not a sculptor, and in this respect his approach to Negro carving was similar to that of Picasso's in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. He raided Negro art for what he could get. At the same time, Picasso's precepts and example must have led him to accept Negro art as one of the great art traditions of the world, a reservoir of wild distorted forms relevant to the most modern needs. In using shapes with vaguely Negro peripheries, in endowing faces with mask-like properties, he knew he was being not merely modern but true to the ancient traditions of his people. The result was a series of pictures in which he took, on the one hand, the Negro's attitude of awe before nature, his sense of the forest as at least as living as human beings, and, on the other hand, used natural forms to express his own fears, longings, anxieties and dreams (Fig. 46). The forest is no longer viewed as one of his ancestors might well have viewed it—a danger zone filled with savage raging monsters. It is rather a collection of personages, projected by his own repressed wishes. The trees have still the stately elegance of trees as we know them. The soft fruits of the tropics swell from their trunks and branches. But the trees are more than trees. Their bulbous fruits possess what Graham Greene has called 'the infinite erotic appeal of projecting buttocks'. Negro masks peer from the upper leaves and we realize that we are watching not a simple section of the jungle, but a series of sinister women, imbued with naïve and savage sensuality, supple and abundant as the tropics themselves, but totally indifferent to the desperate longings of a passionate heart. The art is Wifredo Lam's, but the vitalizing agent, the genius at bottom, is Picasso.

It is considerations of this order which come to mind when we analyse the work of Keyt. Like Lam, he was confronted in Ceylon with an art tradition which had broken down. There was no longer any art which was both Ceylonese and modern. The only art to possess vitality was the art of the past; and here his position was particularly difficult. Unlike the great sub-continent itself in which painting and sculpture have flourished in profusion, Ceylon has always been restricted in its own productions. The fresco paintings, illustrated in Coomaraswamy's *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, need not concern us. They are mainly of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and afford no solution to the problems with which we are concerned. Miniature painting does not seem to have thriven at any of the Ceylonese courts, and a type of art which might otherwise have preserved essential aspects of the Indian tradition was therefore unavailable. The only paintings of importance were the wall-paintings of the early period—a period which begins in the fifth century and ends in the twelfth. Yet even here great difficulties existed. The majority of post-sixth-century paintings are either fragmentary, dim or so inaccessible that they are more the property of the Archaeological Survey than of the Ceylonese. On the other hand, one series of early paintings is well preserved and at the same time so well known and accessible that it constitutes a vital definition of Ceylonese art. These paintings are the twenty-one pictures of ladies carrying flowers, painted on the high western face of the Lion rock of Sigiri in the middle of the island (Fig. 51). The paintings were executed at the end of the fifth century, and although opinion has varied concerning the actual identity of the figures and their precise purpose, they express in glamorous manner the early Ceylonese conception of feminine form. Ceylonese painting, in fact, is Sigiri painting, and just as in the pictures of Wifredo Lam the relics of a culture long since outmoded still testify to permanent elements in the Negro mentality, the paintings at Sigiri provided Keyt with abounding confirmation for his views on love and romance. In almost every picture, plants, flowers or leaves are brought into intimate association with the feminine physique—serving sometimes as symbols of a plant-like luxuriance, sometimes as invitations to romance, sometimes as poetic indications of female charm. The paintings, in fact, are equivalent to Indian love-poetry, and although their literal imitation could in no circumstances have solved Keyt's artistic problem, they proved that admiration for women was an essential ingredient in Ceylonese art.

If Sigiri paintings provided Keyt with a relevant if distant norm, the question arises whether any other art and in particular Indian sculpture and painting also affected his development. It is obvious that certain kinds of Indian painting are very close to certain pictures by Keyt. Besides a common preoccupation with romance, trees and flowers are introduced in the same poetic manner. Not only that, but detailed stylistic idioms—the employment of scarlet backgrounds to indicate passion, the reduction of the nose and forehead to a single straight line, the deliberate use of great enlarged eyes—all these are essential ingredients in the styles of Central India, Mewar and Basohli. Even in Indian sculpture, the faces of girls on the great temple façades at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh (Fig. 5) have something of the same serene straightness as those in pictures by Keyt, while the rotundity of some of Keyt's female forms can be matched in early Indian sculpture from Karla[1] and Mathura. Such analogies, however, do not carry us very far. They demonstrate—what indeed is obvious enough—that Keyt is Indian in spirit and that his work is a vital continuation of a tradition which found electrical expression in certain kinds of Indian poetry and painting. What they do not prove is that Keyt's painting owes anything to the actual study of Indian examples. There is no proof that he copied Indian sculpture and painting—certainly not between the years 1927 and 1942, when he was maturing his style. Any parallels, therefore, would seem to be adventitious, and we shall probably be on safer ground if we regard Indian poetry as the common source of inspiration. Indian paintings, particularly of the kinds we have just been describing, were all derived from Indian poems. They were illustrations of poetic texts, and their imagery was decided not by the artist but by the poet. If then—and this is clear enough—Keyt was saturated in Indian poetry, we have at least one explanation of why some of his pictures should resemble, in certain details, some of those from India. The link, if we must find one, is poetry, not painting, and just as the needs of poetry led Indian artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to invent certain stylistic idioms and employ them in their paintings, it is the same poetic requirements which compelled Keyt to invent similar forms.

How, then, did Keyt become an artist and, what is more important, not merely an artist, but a modern one? The answer turns, in the first place, on his connexion with the Colombo Art Club. This club was actively encouraged by Winzer, but it was not an official academy; and the kind of oil-painting which was encouraged by it had definite relations with Post-Impressionism. In fact, just as Amrita Sher-Gil received her training in a Paris which admired the work of Gauguin, Cézanne and Modigliani, Keyt used as his starting-point a kind of modified naturalism—a naturalism based on the careful observation of landscapes and models, but regulated by a sense of structural co-ordination.

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[1] Zimmer, *op. cit.*, pls. 81–83.

He began, in fact, with Nature, but with a Nature already reduced to unity and form. The result, therefore, was a first period lasting from 1927 to 1932 in which his pictures seem mostly to resemble either those of the modern French artist, Derain, or those of that very much lesser British artist, Duncan Grant. Each of these artists is a diluted Cézanne, and we can well understand how, in acquiring the elements of oil-painting, Keyt should first have adopted a compromise between academic naturalism, on the one hand, and non-representation on the other. Structure is everything and although pictures such as *Kandyan Scene*, *Panteru Dancers* and *Kandyan Portrait*[1] evoke lush effects, it is their sense of solid organization which chiefly impresses. Of these pictures the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda ventured to write:

> 'Keyt, I think, is the living nucleus of a great painter. In all his work there is the moderation of maturity. Magically though he places his colours, and carefully though he distributes his plastic volumes, Keyt's pictures nevertheless produce a dramatic effect, particularly in his paintings of Sinhalese people. These figures take on a strange expressive grandeur, and radiate an aura of intensely profound feeling.'

At the least, therefore, Keyt had acquired by 1933 an adequate technique, and although his landscapes bear little relation to what was to prove his chief preoccupation, poetic romance, he had now acquired a semi-personal style and could use oil-painting for private ends.

It is his next period, from 1933 to 1936, however, which proved decisive. Among the brilliant and lively minds at Colombo was the photographer Lionel Wendt, some of whose studies have since been published in the book *Lionel Wendt's Ceylon*. Like Rabindranath Tagore and Amrita Sher-Gil, Wendt had visited Europe, had seen examples of modern painting and had also imbibed something of Western vitality. He was to stand, in fact, to Ceylonese painting in the same relation as the photographer Man Ray stood to French. Wendt undoubtedly played a crucial role in Keyt's development—partly by encouraging him with patronage, partly through his passionate adhesion to modern art, but perhaps, above all, by acting as a stimulating purveyor of modern artistic ideals. We cannot be sure that it was actually through Wendt that copies of the French art magazine *Cahiers d'Art* reached Keyt. But copies of this journal did reach him, and two particular issues, volumes 7 and 8 of 1932 and 1933, had an immediate and revolutionary influence on Keyt's style. In these issues the work of Matisse was not represented. It is possible, therefore, that even earlier issues may have reached Ceylon and acted as a stimulus in this new formative period. Certainly there is a kind of picture by Matisse (Fig. 49) which is of vital relevance to Keyt's later painting. It consists of studies of the nude, and just as Matisse can only be understood in terms of the previous art of Renoir, an art in which the sumptuous splendour of the female form receives a kind of revelling homage, some of Keyt's new pictures have precisely this quality of formal grandeur, of sensuous delectation. We have only, in fact, to compare a painting of a nude by Matisse reproduced in *Cahiers d'Art*, Number 2 of 1927, with a picture by Keyt, *Two Women*,[1] painted in 1933, to discern this intimate connexion. Keyt's painting has a greater smoothness of line and texture. But its subject, reclining nudes, is exactly the same, the physical ideals could hardly be closer, and the emotional attitude of approving sensuality is identical with Matisse's. Ideas of woman as grand and monumental, as massively poetic, as powerful and majestic, yet lovingly tender were expressed in this kind of French art, and they must clearly have provided Keyt's own feelings with the kind of sanction which he desperately needed.

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[1] Martin Russell, *George Keyt* (Bombay, 1950,), pls. 1–3.

Matisse, then, is the clue to certain pictures by Keyt. The period between 1933 and 1936, however, was nothing if not experimental, and we can see in various pictures the vitalizing shock which Keyt must also have experienced from reproductions of work by Braque and Picasso. Both these artists employed daring distortions. Both were free of tame subservience to naturalism and its conventions. And Keyt must suddenly have realized that a whole new series of idioms lay ready to hand for conscious adoption and that ideas of what was vital in modern art must be sharply revised. The result was a series of pictures in which, side by side with nudes suggested by Renoir and Matisse, other pictures were painted in which Braque and Picasso played the role of mentor. In his pictures, *Still Life with Buddhist Objects* and *Still Life with Mangoes*,[2] the dominant influence is a certain kind of Braque. At this time, however, neither Braque nor Picasso was static, and it is not surprising, therefore, that a second style common to both also served as a lively generator. This second style is illustrated in pictures such as *Lovers*, *Mother and Child* and

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[1] Martin Russell, *ibid.*, pl. 37.

[2] *Ibid.*, pls. 28, 29.

Woman Reclining.[1] Here the chief idiom is a dashing calligraphic line, hinting at shapes rather than reproducing them and notable for its brisk undulations, sweeping curves, gaunt distortions and pin-like heads. Traces of Keyt's adhesion to certain physical ideals are evident enough, but the style deliberately avoids all sensuous attraction and is remarkable for its leaping line and nimble energy. Such a style shows how strongly impressed Keyt must have been by the originality of these two great masters. But the style is quite remote from his own method of expression and, to understand the pictures which he painted in the period from 1936 to 1937, a period which introduces us to the true, authentic Keyt, we must consider two other modern styles.

Among the pictures reproduced in Numbers 7 and 10 of *Cahiers d'Art* is a series of paintings by Picasso illustrating yet another of his varied manners. They were painted in 1932, and while two of them are a *Still Life* and an *Abstract Design*, others represent a softly rounded woman asleep (Fig. 47), gazing in a mirror or day-dreaming on the floor or in a chair. The atmosphere is one of relaxation, of luxuriating softness, and, in contrast to so many of Picasso's paintings, woman is viewed as a source of tender bliss. Her vast rotund form, the epitome of soft surrender, stares from the canvas, hypnotizing the spectator by its abrupt abandonment of Picasso's former taste. The agent of this style is a thick brush-stroke, heavily demarcating swelling curves and eliminating by its wilful clumsiness all trace of sentimental weakness. The picture is hardly the likeness of a woman to be loved. It is rather a strident expression of the artist's attitude to certain very womanly qualities, a raucous proclamation of woman as he now values, needs or loves her. All these pictures have flat planes and, as a corollary, avoid recourse to shading. But their vitality is immense, the coarse rhythmical outline conveys an air of robust, masculine vigour and the model herself exudes the very essence of Indian physique.

Such qualities obviously coincided with Keyt's unconscious needs. Until 1936 he was potentially a brilliant artist, but without a clearly formed style. Picasso, in this unconsciously 'Indian' phase, showed him the way, and in a series of pictures painted in 1936 and 1937, Keyt not only adopted as models relaxed and dreaming women but also employed a heavy rhythmical line, using it again and again to transmit ideas of woman as softly majestic.

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[1] Martin Russell, *George Keyt*, pls. 34, 38, 40.

State Museum, LUCKNOW.

Yet decisive as this influence was, it was far from being all. Indeed in one respect—its somewhat callous brutality—Picasso's art contained an element completely at variance with Keyt's own feelings. Moreover, the lack of modelling and shading, the repudiation of volume, ran counter to Keyt's conception of woman as rapturously tactile. For projecting his first mature style, then, a certain mitigation of Picasso's 'Indian' manner was necessary, and the artist who seems to have effected this transformation was Fernand Léger. Like Braque, Léger had had a number of his pictures reproduced in *Cahiers d'Art* (Fig. 53), and Keyt had therefore every opportunity for studying his methods. These can be described as a tubular simplification of human forms, a reliance on brisk and swinging curves, with, at the same time, a very decided use of light and shade in order to convey a sense of volume. Where Picasso was flat and two-dimensional, Léger was acutely aware of objects in depth, and it was the wish to portray woman in all her rounded grandeur which may have led Keyt to utilize his idioms.

The results are apparent in 1936 and 1937. During these years Keyt's zest for poetry and romance results not only in a certain kind of subject-matter but in a certain style, a style which is now so in line with traditional Indian painting that its actual affinities with Matisse, Picasso and Léger seem unimportant or accidental. Lovers are his main theme, but instead of portraying only human loves, he frequently depicts Krishna, the divine lover, and his human consorts, the milkmaids of Brindaban. There is no attempt at minimizing physical charm. On the contrary, he luxuriates in womanly physiques, constantly depicting vast thighs, rounded flanks and swelling breasts. The ecstasies of union are suggested by blending curves, body melting into body in a series of intimate embraces. Throughout his work, the prime attitude is one of lyrical delight in the senses and nowhere is this more tenderly expressed than in the picture *Varsha Vihara* (Fig. 48)—the woman's body straining upwards with simple yearning innocence as the lover, his face and arms a glowing scarlet, encircles her from behind. In this phase of Keyt's art, colour plays a subtle symbolic role, scarlet evoking passion and yellow the glow of love-inspired women. The chief instrument of expression, however, is a firm rhythmical line, but shading is used again and again to emphasize the rounded character of the body and suggest its glamour.

Between 1938 and 1947 exploration of romance remained the salient feature of Keyt's painting. We must remember, however, that only the least

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[1] Martin Russell, *George Keyt*, pls. 34, 38, 40.

State Museum, LUCKNOW.

Yet decisive as this influence was, it was far from being all. Indeed in one respect—its somewhat callous brutality—Picasso's art contained an element completely at variance with Keyt's own feelings. Moreover, the lack of modelling and shading, the repudiation of volume, ran counter to Keyt's conception of woman as rapturously tactile. For projecting his first mature style, then, a certain mitigation of Picasso's 'Indian' manner was necessary, and the artist who seems to have effected this transformation was Fernand Léger. Like Braque, Léger had had a number of his pictures reproduced in *Cahiers d'Art* (Fig. 53), and Keyt had therefore every opportunity for studying his methods. These can be described as a tubular simplification of human forms, a reliance on brisk and swinging curves, with, at the same time, a very decided use of light and shade in order to convey a sense of volume. Where Picasso was flat and two-dimensional, Léger was acutely aware of objects in depth, and it was the wish to portray woman in all her rounded grandeur which may have led Keyt to utilize his idioms.

The results are apparent in 1936 and 1937. During these years Keyt's zest for poetry and romance results not only in a certain kind of subject-matter but in a certain style, a style which is now so in line with traditional Indian painting that its actual affinities with Matisse, Picasso and Léger seem unimportant or accidental. Lovers are his main theme, but instead of portraying only human loves, he frequently depicts Krishna, the divine lover, and his human consorts, the milkmaids of Brindaban. There is no attempt at minimizing physical charm. On the contrary, he luxuriates in womanly physiques, constantly depicting vast thighs, rounded flanks and swelling breasts. The ecstasies of union are suggested by blending curves, body melting into body in a series of intimate embraces. Throughout his work, the prime attitude is one of lyrical delight in the senses and nowhere is this more tenderly expressed than in the picture *Varsha Vihara* (Fig. 48)—the woman's body straining upwards with simple yearning innocence as the lover, his face and arms a glowing scarlet, encircles her from behind. In this phase of Keyt's art, colour plays a subtle symbolic role, scarlet evoking passion and yellow the glow of love-inspired women. The chief instrument of expression, however, is a firm rhythmical line, but shading is used again and again to emphasize the rounded character of the body and suggest its glamour.

Between 1938 and 1947 exploration of romance remained the salient feature of Keyt's painting. We must remember, however, that only the least emotional of lovers is undistracted by outside events or personal crises. In periods of fulfilment, the lover-artist may concern himself with depicting the charms of the beloved, with conveying a sense of vivid delectation. But at times of deprivation, quite different feelings may occupy his mind. He may then express all the furies of frustration and an element of savage, even bitter resentment may colour his style. Indeed, just as in history we can often discern one movement evoking its own counter-movement, the poet, particularly when he is sensitive to outside happenings, will evince the same sharp alternation between two different attitudes and styles. And although it would be beyond our purpose to probe too closely into the private currents of Keyt's life, we can perhaps draw certain inferences from political events in Europe and Asia during this period and from the very revealing poems which he published in 1937.

To an Indian and Ceylonese artist of sensibility the pre-war period, indeed the war itself, must obviously have induced a feeling of crisis, a feeling heightened by the spectacle of all his most cherished values being brutally threatened. Love itself involves a measure of freedom and spontaneity, and when outside events demonstrate the triumph of force—the annihilation of the very conditions in which love and poetry can best flourish—it is idle to expect a poet-artist to be undisturbed. We know the kind of moods which were generated in England by the spread of Fascism and the sinister approach of war in Europe. These conditions were not exactly reproduced in Ceylon, but there is sufficient similarity to enable us to understand Keyt's personal position. Japan was fanning out over the Far East and, although Ceylon was not immediately threatened, the island possessed its own problem, that of achieving independence from the British. This problem, Martin Russell has pointed out, was solved in a typically Ceylonese fashion.

'During the nineteen-twenties [he says] many of the more progressive sections began to feel that they had had enough of the domination of Europe and that many of the ancient ideas of the earlier civilisations of Ceylon and India which survived among those not Anglicized and the peasantry contained more wisdom and beauty than contemporary fashion was willing to admit. The civilisations of Europe were not disparaged, as they might have been, in order to make the newly revived ideas seem to glow more brightly by comparison; on the contrary, the process of assimilating ideas from Europe continued, and was not checked or tortured by the agonies of violent political conflict. Gentler methods of obtaining independence were sufficient.'

In India, on the other hand, the national struggle for independence became steadily more acute, and when Keyt visited India for the first time in 1939 he could not escape the general contagion. Indian culture and poetry were essential parts of his make-up, and he could hardly visit that greatly loved land without becoming aware of the conflict with the British, the insults to India involved in British rule and the bitter frustration affecting the whole country. If, then, he already possessed a tendency to frenzy, events in India, Asia and even Europe might well exacerbate it.

It is against this background that the poems of 1936 and 1937 acquire their vital significance. The first volume (1936) bore the simple title *Poems*, and this was followed in 1937 by *The Darkness Disrobed* and *Image in Absence*.

'Their chief theme [Martin Russell has said] is the pain of separation—not necessarily, in this case, separation from a person, but separation from a mood, from an emotion, from the intensity of living which the artist desires. Intimate in their core of meaning, difficult of access in their presentation, they speak of deep disturbances in the artist's life.'

What these 'deep disturbances' exactly were need not be discussed, but it is clear from some of the verses that emotional frustration accounted for part, at least, of their anguish.

I

I lie concealed beneath the passionate blunderings of
 a vast appetite
I am helpless among the brazen curtains
In dreams I see myself ragged before the reflection of
 a nakedness
I wander for ever, with dazed eyes.
Transformed into rows of statues repeated along a
 bewildering avenue where there are columns
 which never end,
Monotonous columns which fill me with despair.

II

Resembling a sound which through a constant repetition
ceases to divide itself from silence.
When through a recurrence
An eclipse occurs in the sky of a fixed love.
There are those who say that it is better not to feed
on the food of forbidden love
And they live feverishly
Endeavouring to replenish themselves with a void which
sucks them inward like a child at a dry nipple
They struggle in darkness and in sleep when alone
When desire can no more be kept at bay by congregated
derision and laughter
And they wander with famine in their eyes
Gazing with the greed of famine
Finding it difficult to wander away from the food of
forbidden love.

III

Among the heavy trees and sound of twisted wind
Black clouds above them and the livid sky
Wandering with fingers interlocked
A feeling 'never again, this may never be'
Sensations clamouring for the final sigh.

(*Poems*)

IV

I await in terror the awakening of the wind of distraction
In fear, imagining the wind dead for ever,
The wind throwing into turmoil of forgetfulness
The foliage of longings and the cobwebs,
The helpless shreds of despair;
And the wind arises in the foliage
Among clouds and cobwebs, in dust and on water,
And my terror dies with the departure of intimate silence,
And the stillness of the dead noon around me,
The motionless arrival of an absence
Come again to haunt me.

V

My senses convey to me the signs of a forest,
It seems the wind wears a look of having seduced the trees
The sky appears to be ready to revive the streams when
they pause
But I look around to find myself in a desert;
The shadowless plain extends for ever,
And I see, above the burning waste, a solitary cloud in starvation
Looking down in anger on the sun endeavouring to feed it.

VI

I gaze into the sound of a name
Like flavour in colour, like colour in sound
Recalling an image in exile,
And I see a great disc in the sky where many rings
involve the darkening clouds
And like a cone in recession the disc resembles a whirlpool
Holding far down within it an image in exile.
(*Image in Absence*)

To these poems we may add the following lines:

I shall spare the work of absence,
The hidden image, the twisted longing ecstatic in entanglement,
Desires fading into foliage.

When we consider some of these phrases—'the foliage of longings', 'the motionless arrival of an absence come again to haunt me', 'a solitary cloud in starvation', 'I gaze into the sound of a name', 'an image in exile'—we can easily understand how moods of frenzy alternated in Keyt with moods of exaltation resulting in two quite different kinds of picture.

It is these differing emotions which characterize the period from 1938 to 1947. In 1938 the sense of love as calmly exalted has broken down and in its place has come a frenzied anguish. This may well have been induced by outside events such as the spread of Fascism, for we find Keyt abandoning Krishna themes and concentrating instead on subjects such as Siva, the great Destroyer. In *Vibhatsa Raga*, Siva appears furiously dancing. In *Maheshvara*, he rides his bull. In *Yama and Savitri*, Yama, the God of Death, viciously regards the contours of the anguished Savitri, and in *Rakshas Vivahaya* there is a sense of demoniacal striving.[1] But the sense of frenzy can hardly have been induced by world events alone, for the same air of frantic desperation, of convulsive posturing is seen in his four pictures of the dancer, Jalaja. In almost all these pictures the former preference for glossy globular forms has disappeared and their place has been taken by nervous agitated lines stabbing the figures with furious resentment and causing even the grand physique of Jalaja seemingly to bristle with savage cruelty.[2] The former linear rhythm is still present, but instead of being deployed for purposes of rapture it now expresses a violent crucifixion of the feelings.

Such a style hints at a deep emotional conflict. The crisis, however, gradually subsided, for the next year, 1939, shows a marked reduction of tension, the stiff bristling lines disappear, and not only in the pictures of *Draupadi* and *Abhisarika*, but in the frescoes for the Buddhist centre at Borella,[3] near Colombo, which he completed in 1940, there is a return to a calmer frame of mind, a renewed adoration of the feminine form and once again a frank acceptance of its salient features. As at Ajanta, and indeed in all early Buddhist paintings of Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha-to-be, harshness is totally wanting. There is rather an air of melancholy, of wistful regret at the denial of passion—a sense that such full and lovely bodies need not and should not be denied.

These pictures bring to a close a period of great fertility, and it is possible that the crisis of 1938 may have imposed so severe a strain that rest was dictated. At any rate, in 1940, Keyt temporarily abandoned painting, and it was only in 1941 that he gradually resumed it. He drew for *Kesari*, a left-wing weekly newspaper, 'mainly distinguished', as Martin Russell dryly remarks, 'by a total indifference to proof-correction'. Such work was obviously of little permanent significance, but his association with a political party perhaps explains why, when in 1942 he recommenced painting, he again reverted to themes of conflict. Russell has noted how one of his drawings, *The Rejection of Siva*,[4] was done 'like many others as a protest at the refusal of the British authorities to make India free', and he goes on to emphasize that Keyt's emotions were deeply engaged by the struggle against imperialism in India and Fascism abroad—feelings which found an outlet in the paintings and line-drawings illustrating the struggle between Bhima and Jarasandha.[5] Bhima was the leading Pandava and hero of the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*, and

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[1] Martin Russell, *George Keyt*, pls. 50–52, 55.

[2] *Ibid.*, pls. 53, 54, 57, 58.

[3] *Ibid.*, pls. 59–63.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[5] *Ibid.*, pls. 64–66.

Jarasandha one of the principal demon monarchs whom Krishna constantly engaged in battle and intended to slay. Each was therefore peculiarly symbolic of contemporary trends and we notice how in Keyt's pictures every form is wild and contorted and the rhythm has a savage fury.

This mood, however, quickly ended. Almost immediately a feeling of tranquil exaltation triumphed and for three creative years, 1942 to 1944, Keyt was once again the poet of love, investing with excitement the feminine form, portraying girls as avid for rapture and imbuing with poetry their sumptuous grace. In this series of over thirty pictures, there is little or no trace of the glossy tubular idiom employed in *Yama and Savitri*, and while shading is sometimes resorted to, the style depends for its vigour on robust washes of colour and on fervent line. As in much Indian painting the nose and forehead are treated as a single straight line, eyes are enlarged and trees, plants and foliage are brought into intimate conjunction with the female body. Some of these idioms may derive from Picasso's *Girl with a Mirror*, reproduced in Number 7 of *Cahiers d'Art*—there is too strong a similarity between some of the faces in Picasso's paintings and those in Keyt's for all influence to be entirely discounted—yet the upshot is so poetic, the love of woman so strong and tender, the general feeling so entirely one of enchantment at girlish grace that even if certain ingredients must be connected with Picasso, the pictures are quite unlike Picasso's in their final effect. Like Indian artists in Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills, Keyt is here concerned with woman as the supreme object of masculine regard. Drawing deeply on a sensibility saturated in Indian love-poetry, he returns again and again to the situation of the lonely beauty, brooding on her physical attractions and emanating glamorous calm. It is the peace and relaxations of loving which now suffuse his mind—all signs of fury or anxiety dissolving in the enchantments of sensuous form.

Beneath flowering branches
You sit relaxed like the twilight
With the blue sky and the yellow sun on
either side of you
Resting your cheek on your arms,
Bare arms like waterfalls;
But that which the night will wash away
I cannot stay sharing—
Your dreams in the sun.

This poem was published in the volume *The Darkness Disrobed* (1937); but it exactly expresses the mood of passionate delight which characterizes pictures such as *Prema* (Fig. 57), *Girl Bathing*, *Nayika* (Fig. 59)—with its green foliage caressing the girl's back against a scarlet sky—*Woman with Sheaf* (Fig. 58), *Kinnari*, *Reverie* and *Woman with Bird* (Fig. 61)—where the bird nestling beside two opulent breasts hints as in other Indian pictures at the true object of the woman's thoughts, an absent lover hurrying to join her.

These pictures probably constitute some of Keyt's greatest achievements—the expression in terms of Indian and modern art of moods inseparable from traditional Indian feeling. Yet it was hardly possible that intense rapture should last indefinitely. Indeed the continued exploration of the same exciting theme may well have generated its own reaction. Towards the end of 1944, then, we find a new kind of picture emerging. The old fevered frenzy reappears, brush-strokes again acquire a wild impetuous vigour, and in place of serenity there is every sign of tortured anguish. In the picture *No Sooner Uprooted than Transplanted*,[1] a naked girl assisted by a friend stands holding a bowl of foliage, while her lover waits and watches. The theme itself is far from disturbing, but the treatment of the girl herself reveals how far the artist has already departed from his earlier mood. Instead of displaying her as a sinuous whole, he now deliberately divides the breasts from the haunches, conceding their sensual attraction but withholding that most Indian of perceptions—the realization that woman is more than the sum of her parts. In the picture the legs and haunches are one thing, the head, breasts, torso and arms another. The latter are, as it were, deposited on the former as if a saw had accomplished its cruel purpose, dividing the body into two. Glamour of a kind is still present, but sinister disquiet is inescapable. A similar air of frenzy can be felt in the *Portrait of M*, *The Toilet* and in the *Portrait of a Woman*,[2] where forms and faces have each a brusque harshness. But perhaps the most revealing proof of gathering ferocity lies in the sudden adoption of his long-discarded subjects, *Still Lifes*. During the years 1931 to 1933, his *Still Lifes* with their Braque-like rhythms had acted as a complement to his studies of women, the shapes with their flaccid rotundity hinting at the same kind of physical ideals. The same process now reoccurred. In his pictures *Still Life with Wild Flowers*, *Still Life with Melon* and *Still Life with Fruit*,[3] the nominal subjects are of no interest whatever. Their true purpose is to symbolize a sexual relationship and in portraying objects whose shapes have obvious physical associations and then treating them with savage harshness, Keyt was virtually expressing the same aversion as in his pictures of women.

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[1] Martin Russell, *George Keyt*, pl. 85.
[2] *Ibid.*, pls. 84, 86, 88.
[3] *Ibid.*, pls. 89, 90, 92.

This mood seems to have lasted throughout 1945. It is characteristic of Keyt as a poet-artist, however, that while both kinds of emotional attitude seem essential to his temperament, loving adoration is far stronger than any merely negative emotion. After exploring feelings of ecstasy he swings to the opposite extreme, but it is typical of his constitution that he never stays there for the same length of time. A will to sensuous delight reasserts itself, and the one supreme subject which fascinates him as a poet and connects him with the Indian tradition comes surging back. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that after reacting in 1945 from the enraptured paintings of the previous years, he returned in 1946 to cultivate once more the same romantic theme. During this year he went to Bombay, remaining in India until 1949. His work was at once acclaimed by critics such as Mulk Raj Anand, and the large one-man show which was held in 1947 did much to maintain his confidence and restore his morale. The experience of once again living in India, the India to which in spirit he has always belonged, induced him to re-explore his favourite subject, and in pictures such as *Sringar* (Fig. 60) and *Girl Singing*, both painted in India in 1947, he employed all his resources—springing line, rhythmical form and glowing colour—to imbue his subjects with innocent sensuality and poetic charm. It was in August of this year that India achieved independence, and the epoch with which we have been concerned came to an end.

NOTES ON SOURCES

I

In compiling the present account, I have drawn on the following indispensable sources—Karl Khandalavala, *Amrita Sher-Gil* (New Book Co., Bombay), Martin Russell, *George Keyt* (Marg, Bombay, 1950), Ajit Mookerjee, *Modern Art in India* (Oxford Book and Stationery Co., Calcutta), and on the Indian art journals, *Rupam* and *Marg*, the latter published from 34–8 Bank Street, Bombay, and edited by Dr Mulk Raj Anand. For surveys and histories of modern art, I am especially indebted to Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art* (Rodker, London, 1931), R. H. Wilenski, *Modern French Painters* (Faber, London, 1940), M. Raynal, *The History of Modern Painting* (Zwemmer & Skira, London and Switzerland, 1949 and 1953), the French art journal, *Cahiers d'Art*, and the following works by Sir Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art*, *Art Now*, *The Philosophy of Modern Art* (Faber, London, 1931, 1933 and 1952 respectively) and *Contemporary British Art* (Penguin Books, London, 1951).

For Chapter I, I have consulted *The Journal of Indian Art and Industry* (1883–9) where details of art manufactures are provided and the causes of decay are listed. For art schools, their development and syllabuses, I have drawn on *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, IV (Oxford, 1909), Cecil Burns, 'Art Schools in India', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* (London, June 1909), A. K. Coomaraswamy, 'The Function of Schools of Art in India', *The Modern Review* (Calcutta, 1910), and Lionel Heath, 'The Mayo School of Arts, Lahore', *Art and Letters* (London, 1931). Trevelyan's views on Indian education are given in his evidence before the Select Committee, House of Lords, on the Government of Indian Territories, 1853, and are quoted in 'Education of Indians, 1833–53', *The Modern Review* (Calcutta, 1910). The career of Ravi Varma is described in detail in V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, III (Trivandrum, 1906). The statement by C. R. Das is quoted by the Earl of Ronaldshay, *The Heart of Aryavarta* (London, 1925). Other quotations are from J. H. Stocqueler, *The Handbook of India* (London, 1844), W. D. Arnold, *Oakfield* (London, 1853), M. Monier Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India* (London, 1885) and R. C. Temple, *Men and Events of My Time in India* (London, 1882). The official handbook of the Victoria and Albert Museum was compiled by Sir George Birdwood and issued in 1880 as *The Industrial Arts of India*. For Indian paintings of Native Characters, Trades, Conveyances, Birds and Flowers, see Mildred and W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting for the British* (Oxford, 1956).

II

Art and Revivalism. The primary sources for Havell's theories are his book, *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (London, 1st edition, 1908)—to be distinguished from the later and much revised second edition of 1928—and his papers 'The New Indian School of Painting', *The Studio* (London, 1908) and 'Art Administration in India', *Journal of the*

Royal Society of Arts (London, 1910). For Mughal painting, the reader is referred to Percy Brown, *Indian Painting under the Mughals* (Oxford, 1924), I. Stchoukine, *La Peinture Indienne* (Paris, 1929) and J. V. S. Wilkinson, *Mughal Painting* (Faber, London, 1947); for the cave paintings of Ajanta, the best and most recent studies are G. Yazdani, *Ajanta Frescoes* (Oxford, 1930–55), and Madanjeet Singh, *India: Paintings from Ajanta Caves* (Unesco World Art Series, New York Graphic Society, 1956). The growth of Indian nationalism is discussed in E. Thompson, *The Reconstruction of India* (London, 1930), P. J. Griffiths, *The British Impact on India* (London, 1952) and H. Nicholson, *King George V, His Life and Reign* (London, 1952). For discussions of Abanindranath Tagore (1871–1951), I have referred, amongst others, to:

Banerji, S. C., 'Abanindranath Tagore: the Man and his Art', *The Modern Review* (Calcutta, May 1922).

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Paintings by Abanindranath Tagore are reproduced in *The Modern Review*, IX and X (Calcutta, 1911), *The Journal of Indian Art and Industry* (1912 and 1916), E. B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (London, 1928), V. A. Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon* (Oxford, 2nd edition, 1930), Ajit Mookerjee, *Art of India* (Oxford Book and Stationery Co., Calcutta, 1952), P. R. Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting* (Madras, 1953) and the Government of India's *Indian Art through the Ages* (New Delhi, 1951). The Victoria and Albert Museum possesses five original water-colour paintings and a chromo-lithograph illustrating a verse from Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam*, inscribed, 'To my guru E. B. Havell Esq., A.R.C.A. May 23rd, 1911, Calcutta. A. N. Tagore.'

III

For the present chapter, 'Art and Nationality', I have used the Indian art journal, *Rupam* (1921 and 1922), containing a contribution by Benoy Kumar Sarkar, 'The Aesthetics of Young India', a rejoinder by 'Agastya' (O. C. Gangoly) and two important statements by the same writer, 'A New Contribution to Shaivite Art' and a critique of the 'Annual Exhibition of the Society of Oriental Art, Calcutta, 1921'. In quoting from Gangoly, I have also drawn on his paper 'The New Indian School of Painting' already referred to. These contributions together with Coomaraswamy's paper, 'The Modern School of Indian Painting', and Shahid Suhrawardy's essay, 'A Nation's Art', *Prefaces* (Calcutta University, 1938), supply the chief material for discussions of artistic theory. The quotation from Herbert Read is from his *Contemporary British Art*.

The part played by Sir William Rothenstein in determining the modern approach to Indian art is discussed in a special Rothenstein issue of *Art and Letters*, the journal of the Royal India, Pakistan and Ceylon Society (London, xxv, 1951). Indian sculpture is discussed in H. Zimmer, *The Art of Indian Asia* (New York, 1955), Stella Kramrisch, *The Art of India* (Phaidon, London, 1955), Raymond Burnier, *Hindu Medieval Sculpture* (Paris, 1950) and Ajit Mookerjee, *Art of India*; Indian painting in Basil Gray, 'Painting', *The Art of India and Pakistan* (ed. L. Ashton, Faber, London, 1950), J. V. S. Wilkinson, 'Indian Painting', *Indian Art* (ed. R. Winstedt, Faber, London, 1947) and W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting* (Iris, Batsford, London, 1956), *The Loves of Krishna* (Allen & Unwin, London, 1957), *Kangra Painting*, *Garhwal Painting* and *Central Indian Painting*—the last three in the Faber Gallery of Oriental Art (London, 1952, 1954 and 1958 respectively).

The Cubist paintings of Gogonendranath Tagore (1867–1938) are discussed in:

Chaudhuri, Nirad C., 'The Art of Gaganendranath Tagore', *The Modern Review*, 1938.

Gangoly, O. C., 'Gogonendranath Tagore', *The Modern Review*, 1938.

Tagore, Rathindranath, 'Cousin Gaganendra', *Vishva-Bharati Quarterly*, IV (1938–9).

Reproductions of his work are published in *The Modern Review* (1912, 1917, 1926, 1928, 1935 and 1936), *Rupam* (1922, 1923), *The Golden Book of Tagore*, *Indian Art through the Ages*, and in G. Venkatachalam, *Contemporary Indian Painters* (Nalanda Publications, Bombay, 1946) and P. R. Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting*.

IV

Art and the Unconcious. The chief sources for a study of Rabindranath Tagore's painting are his own writings, the following being of special significance: *Contributions to the Vishva-Bharati Quarterly*, published from his university at Santiniketan, West Bengal—'A Poet's School' and 'The Meaning of Art' (1926), 'Fireflies' and 'Letters written on the way to Java' (1927), 'Letters from Java' (1928), 'Rabindranath Tagore in Russia' (a report of an interview with Russian art critics) (1931), 'Art and Tradition', two poems, 'The Kopai' and 'The Santal Woman', 'Shesher Kabita' (The Last Poem), an English translation of a novel written in 1928 (1939), 'My Boyhood Days' (1940), 'Notes of a Discussion with Abanindranath Tagore (1942), 'Woman' (1943) and 'My Pictures' (1944–5).

Books: *Reminiscences* (1912), *The Gardener* (1914), *Personality* (1919), *Glimpses of Bengal* (1921), *Letters to a Friend* (1928).

Other Writings: Foreword dated May 28 1930, to an exhibition of his paintings, Poems in *The Modern Review* (1929 and 1932), 'Lecture on Art at Teheran', *The Modern Review*, 1932, 'An address to the Royal India Society', *Indian Art and Letters*, IV, 1931.

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Pictures by Rabindranath Tagore have been reproduced in his two Bengali books, *Khapchhara* and *Se*, and in the following surveys of his paintings, *Chitralipi*, I and II (Calcutta, 1940 and 1951). Other examples are reproduced in the illustrated catalogue to the exhibition of his paintings held at the Government School of Art, Calcutta, 1932, *The Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art* (Calcutta, 1933), *Indian Art through the Ages*, O. C. Gangoly's two articles in *The Modern Review*, Ajit Mookerjee, *Art of India* and *Modern Art in India*, P. R. Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting* and in the special Indian number of the French art journal, *L'Amour de l'Art* (Paris, 1947).

Herbert Read's passage on Picasso is quoted from his collected essays, *In Defence of Shelley* (Heinemann, London, 1936). Passages relating to Klee are from *The Philosophy of Modern Art* and Klee's own book, *On Modern Art* (trans. P. Findlay, Faber, London, 1948).

V

Art and the Village. The indispensable authority for Amrita Sher-Gil's life and painting is the monograph by Karl Khandalavala referred to above. In addition, there is an important memorial number of *The Usha*, III, 2, August 1942, a journal of art and literature published by the Punjab Literary League, Lahore, including her own writings—'The Story of My Life', 'Evolution of My Art', 'Indian Art Today', 'Trends of Art in India', 'Art and Appreciation' and 'Appreciation of Art'. Quotations in the text are from these sources. I have also consulted Francis Watson, 'The Art of Amrita Sher-Gil', and Baldoon Dhingra, 'Some Reminiscences of Amrita Sher-Gil', both in *Marg*, I, 1, 1946.

Apart from Khandalavala's superbly illustrated volume, reproductions of work by Amrita Sher-Gil are given in a small portfolio compiled by the same author, *The Art of Amrita Sher-Gil* (Allahabad Block Works, Allahabad, 1943), the special issue of *The Usha* noted above, *Indian Art through the Ages*, *Marg* I, 2, 1947; VI, I, 1951, P. R. Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting*, and Mildred and W. G. Archer, *Indian Painting for the British*.

Quotations from Gandhi are from *Young India*, 1929. The passage by Somerset Maugham is from *A Writer's Notebook* (London, 1949). The English versions of Sanskrit poetry are by E. Powys Mathers (Mayura, *Eastern Love*), R. S. Pandit, *Ritusamhara* (National Information and Publication Co., Bombay, 1947) and George Keyt, *Sri Jayadeva's Gita Govinda* (Marg, Bombay, 1947).

References to Gauguin are based on Herbert Read's *Gauguin*—first issued with ten reproductions in colour (Faber, London, 1949) and later included, without plates, in *The Philosophy of Modern Art*, R. H. Wilenski, *Modern French Painters*, J. Rewald, *Paul Gauguin* (London, 1938) and on Gauguin's own writings—*Noa Noa* (New York, 1947) and *The Intimate Journals of Paul Gauguin* (London, 1933).

The discussion of Samuel Palmer and his relationship to Blake is derived from a study of these artists' paintings in British public collections and from Geoffrey Grigson, *Samuel Palmer: The Visionary Years* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1947), John Piper, *British Romantic Artists* (Collins, London, 1946), Robert Melville, *Samuel Palmer* (Faber, London, 1956) and A. H. Palmer, *The Life and Letters of Samuel Palmer* (London, 1892).

VI

Art and the Primitive. Discussions of Bengal village art with many reproductions are given in Ajit Ghose, 'Old Bengal Paintings' (*Rupam*, 1926), D. P. Ghosh, 'An Illustrated Ramayana Manuscript of Tulsidas and Pats from Bengal', *Journal Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 1945, and in the following writings by G. S. Dutt, 'The Art of Bengal' and 'Jadupatuas', *The Modern Review*, 1932, 'The Indigenous Painters of Bengal' *Journal Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 1933 and 'The Living Traditions of the Folk Arts in Bengal', *Indian Art and Letters*, 1936. Further reproductions are given in Ajit Mookerjee, *Folk Art of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1939), *Art of India* and *Modern Art in India*. These provide invaluable references to the types of scroll painting which influenced the third and most mature phase of Jamini Roy's work. The best public collections of such scroll paintings are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, the British Museum, London, and in the Asutosh Museum, Calcutta.

For a discussion of Kalighat painting—the style of Bengal art which influenced the artist during the period when he was first breaking free—see W. G. Archer, *Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta* (Victoria and Albert Museum monograph, London, 1953), where forty-two examples are illustrated and a detailed bibliography is provided.

For previous discussions of Jamini Roy and reproductions of his work, see Shahid Suhrawardy, 'The Art of Jamini Roy', *Prefaces* (Calcutta, 1938), Sudhindranath Datta, 'Jamini Roy', *Longmans Miscellany* (Calcutta, 1943), Bishnu Dey and John Irwin, 'Jamini Roy', *Journal Indian Society of Oriental Art* (Calcutta, 1944), E. M. Milford, 'A Modern Primitive', *Horizon* (London, 1944), Shahid Suhrawardy, 'Jamini Roy', *Marg* (Bombay, 1947), John Irwin, 'Jamini Roy and the Indian Tradition', *Indian Art and Letters*, xx, 1947, and P. R. Ramachandra Rao, *Modern Indian Painting*. Further examples of Jamini Roy's paintings are illustrated in *Roopa-Lekha* (New Delhi, 1948–9), *Marg*, I, 2, 1947 and II, I, 1947, and in Ajit Mookerjee's *Art of India* and *Modern Art in India*.

The quotations on nationalism are from E. Thompson and P. J. Griffiths. The comment by Earnan O'Malley on Louis le Brocquy is from an article in *Horizon*, 1956. Picasso's painting, *Cat with a Bird*, is illustrated in F. Elgar and R. Maillard, *Picasso* (London, 1956).

VII

Art and Romance. For painting in Ceylon, I have drawn on A .K. Coomaraswamy, *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (Broad Campden, 1908) and *A History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (London, 1927), Vincent Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon* and the special Ceylon number of *Marg*, v, 3, 1951. The paintings of Sigiri are discussed by S. Paranavitana in *Sigiri Graffiti* (Oxford, 1956) and 'Sigiri, the Abode of a God-King', *Journal Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch*, 1950, and by W. G. Archer and S. Paranavitana, *Ceylon: Paintings from Temple, Shrine and Rock* (Unesco World Art Series, New York Graphic Society, 1957).

For the painting of George Keyt, Martin Russell's monograph, *George Keyt* (Bombay, 1950), is indispensable for facts about the artist's life and for reproductions of his work—its hundred plates in colour, with dates and titles, brilliantly surveying every phase of his development. For further references to Keyt, see L. C. van Geyzel, 'The Painting of George Keyt', *Marg*, I, 3, 1947 and for further illustrations, *Marg* I, II, V and VII. Besides the poems mentioned in the text, Keyt's passionate adhesion to early romantic ideals is shown in his translation, *Sri Jayadeva's Gita Govinda*, and in his earlier volume of translations, *Poetry from the Sinhalese* (Colombo Apothecaries Co., Colombo, 1938). The passages from Kalidasa are from an article by Mulk Raj Anand, 'The Two Sheets: some notes on the costumes of India', *Western Railway Annual* (Bombay, 1953).

The sources for Wifredo Lam are *Cahiers d'Art* (Paris, 1945–6), Pierre Loeb, 'Wifredo Lam', *Horizon* (London, 1946) and W. G. Archer and Robert Melville, *Forty Thousand Years of Modern Art* (Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1949). Leading monographs on Picasso are by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Picasso: Fifty Years of his Art* (New York, 1946) and Elgar and Maillard's *Picasso* referred to above. The fullest surveys of his work and those most relevant to Keyt are provided in *Cahiers d'Art* (Paris, 1925–1946). For Renoir, Matisse, Léger and Braque, the following should be consulted: *Cahiers d'Art*, R. H. Wilenski, *Modern French Painters*, Herbert Read, *Art Now*.

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